

School of Theology at Claremont



1001 1364534

ALL-AT-ONCE RELIGION

WINFRED ERNEST GARRISON



The Library

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT

WEST FOOTHILL AT COLLEGE AVENUE
CLAREMONT, CALIFORNIA

BR
125
G32

A F F I R M A T I V E
R E L I G I O N

By
WINFRED ERNEST GARRISON



HARPER & BROTHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
MCMXXVIII



First Edition

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

COPYRIGHT, 1928, BY HARPER & BROTHERS

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

I C

CONTENTS

I. AFFIRMATION AND NEGATION	I
II. AUTHORITY AND EXPERIENCE	18
III. THE NECESSITY OF BELIEF	36
IV. THE INCREASING CHRIST	52
V. HOLY SCRIPTURES	67
VI. THE CHURCH	89
VII. SIN	105
VIII. SALVATION	119
IX. VIRTUES AND GRACES	138
X. THE DANCE OF LIFE	147
XI. RELIGION AND HEALTH	156
XII. THE ATTAINMENT AND USE OF LIBERTY	175
XIII. THE NECESSITY OF ART	193
XIV. DO WE NEED A NEW RELIGION?	209
XV. THE MYSTICAL MIND	228
XVI. THE LIFE EVERLASTING	252
XVII. THE POSSIBLE YOU	271

Gift from Rev. John H. Engle 6-3-55

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Acknowledgment is hereby gratefully made for permission to use the following poems which are quoted, in whole or in part, in Chapter XV:

To Doubleday, Doran & Co. for the poems by Walt Whitman.

To Houghton, Mifflin & Co. for poems by John Burroughs and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

To Charles Scribner's Sons for "The Marshes of Glynn," by Sidney Lanier, and for the Sonnet by George Santayana.

To Dodd, Mead & Co. for "Transcendence," by Richard Hovey.

To Shaemas O'Sheel and Horace Liveright for Mr. O'Sheel's "They Went Forth to Battle but They Always Fell," published in a recently revised form in "Jealous of Dead Leaves."

To Thomas B. Mosher for "Tears," by Lizette W. Reese.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To The Christian Century for "Thy Sea So Great," and for other material by the author.

Obligations to Mr. Stanton Coit were incurred in connection with Chapter XII for suggestions derived from his book, "The Message of Man."

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION



CHAPTER I

Affirmation and Negation

IT IS a pathetic spectacle to see so many earnestly asking, What may we *still* believe?—as though the faith had been overwhelmed by some dire catastrophe and they were quite content to salvage a little something from the general wreck. Science, it seems, has been making terrible onslaughts upon the strongholds of religion, and the beleaguered faithful are forced to defend a diminished domain with desperate courage. Admitting that much territory has been lost, they snatch a moment from the battle to try to find out how much remains. Or, to abandon the figure, criticism has rendered so many once cherished opinions no longer credible that it is thought advisable to stop and take inventory and see how much is left that is still credible. The assumption underlying this attitude is that faith

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

is increasingly difficult under modern conditions of scientific knowledge and social tensions, and that the religious man ought to congratulate himself if the attrition of knowledge and experience has not ground it down quite to the vanishing point.

Nothing of the sort. This book is written with the conviction that it was never so easy as now to believe the things which are best worth believing, and it is the author's purpose to sketch some of those beliefs and some of those attitudes toward life which seem to him to have both validity and value. They are not the residue remaining after this and that have been rendered untenable by critical thinking. They are not what I "still" believe, but rather what I have become able to believe as the result of such experience as has come my way and such thought processes as have been within my scope.

A piece of good advice often given to young ministers is, Preach what you believe, not what you do not believe. It is a charge rather fre-

AFFIRMATION AND NEGATION

quently made against those with leanings toward liberalism that they deal in negations more than in affirmations. If it were so, it would be a grievous fault, and grievously must any one answer it who adopts an habitually negative tone and posture.

There are at least three reasons for the charge that liberals and modernists spend too much time and energy in negation and not enough in affirmation. The first is that it is partly true. The second is that those who say so commonly classify as a negation any statement which runs counter to their own opinions. The third is that there is a general failure to appreciate the affirmative implications which may be contained in a negative statement.

I say that the charge is partly true. When there is so much of superstition and tradition to be cleared away, the temptation to concentrate upon that form of activity is very strong. It seems so urgently necessary as a preliminary to

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

everything else. In every large city there are firms which do nothing but tear down houses. They make their profit by salvaging as much of the material as they can, but the main value of their work lies in clearing the ground. They destroy some interesting old landmarks, but their activities are not thought of as inimical to the public welfare, for every one knows that the builders will follow the wreckers.

But the figure breaks down, as all mechanical figures do when applied to religion. There is no need for a guild of specialized theological house-wreckers, least of all in the pulpit. Religious truth is not most successfully propagated by first driving out all error. It is not necessary to create a vacuum in order to make room for truth. It is this error which I shall try to avoid by not devoting much time to setting forth what we "can no longer believe" or to denying or disproving what men "used to think."

But having made a general confession for liberals that we perhaps yield too often to the

AFFIRMATION AND NEGATION

temptation to deny and destroy, I hasten to add that any one who brings such a charge against liberals alone and assumes that fundamentalists are engaged constantly in a series of great affirmations, is the victim of an entirely fallacious antithesis. Fundamentalists expend quite as much energy in denying the affirmations of modernism as modernists do in negating the characteristic positions of fundamentalism. Mr. Bryan, for example, dedicated the powers of his last years to the denial of evolution. The anti-evolution measures, adopted in some states and defeated in others, contain no affirmation in regard to the method of creation. They do not define what shall be taught, but only what shall not be taught. A great many of the most standard doctrines of orthodoxy are embodied in statements which are essentially negative. The Westminster Confession defines God as "a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts or passions"—which is chiefly a statement of what God is not and has not. I draw Shedd's *Dogmatic*

Theology from its position, long undisturbed, on a top shelf and dust it off to refresh my memory as to this stout Calvinist's great affirmations about God. They are chiefly concerned with qualities described by adjectives with negative prefixes: "*unextended, immortal, independent, infinite.*" I do not at all object to this denial of extension, mortality, dependence, and finiteness to the Deity. I cite the case only as an evidence that the stoutest orthodoxy is not really so sensitive to negation *per se*, as it is to the negation of its own favorite doctrines. A great part of this criticism of liberals for using negations is merely throwing dust in the air.

And besides, a negative statement may contain very clear implications of affirmation, and vice versa. Doubtless it could be said of the negations just quoted that they imply affirmations, and so they do. There is no special virtue in avoiding negative sentences. There is—or was a year or two ago—a leader of one of the newer cults of cheerfulness and certainty who made it a car-

AFFIRMATION AND NEGATION

dinal point in his method of curing the bodies and souls of men never under any circumstances to employ the words "no" and "not." One should always think positively, not negatively, he said. Therefore, if he were asked whether he had had dinner yet or whether he was hungry, he would reply by some ingenious circumlocution to the effect that he was ready and willing to eat or that he felt sufficiently nourished for the present, as the case might be. If one inquired whether he thought it would rain before noon, it was easy to give a negative response without saying "no" by answering, though at some waste of words, that he was of the opinion that the humidity in the atmosphere would remain in suspension during the period indicated. It is really not very difficult to paraphrase a simple "no," so as to convey the idea without employing the word—but what is the use? Unless one is engaged in the childish occupation of playing flo-pena, it is a mere verbal quibble.

What does matter is that one's statements,

whether positively or negatively phrased, should express a positive faith. Those who so glibly criticize men who utter negations have a dim glimmer of a real idea, for there is neither comfort nor salvation in the mere rehearsal of what "we no longer believe" except as this becomes by implication a statement of what we do believe. Do you believe that your friend is a thief? The thunderous "No!" with which you reply to that question is your affirmation of faith in your friend. Do you believe that God ever rebuked men for showing mercy to the harmless and helpless and insisted on a thoroughgoing slaughter of the innocents? Only a "No!" can be the affirmation of faith in the character of God as even respectable, not to say trustworthy and lovable. When the roll was called at the last session of the Vatican Council for the final vote upon the dogma of papal infallibility, out of two hundred who had opposed the declaration a week before, only two voted "no"; and that "non placet" bravely spoken by the bishop of Cajazzo, Italy,

I Believe.
The affirmative creed.
AFFIRMATION AND NEGATION

and the bishop of Little Rock, Arkansas, was the most affirmative and constructive utterance of that stormy day, for it asserted the liberty of the church against the autocracy of the pope.

Those who have any right to call themselves liberals have at their disposal and awaiting their ministry an affirmative gospel of incalculable power and value. They need not be disturbed by the superficial criticism which will doubtless continue to accuse them of being negative and destructive every time they deny some ancient and unchristian error and try to destroy some entrenched superstition, but they should seek earnestly for the great realities in faith and life, state them in terms of conviction, embody them in programs of helpful service, and set them to doing their proper work in the world. Regardless of their grammatical form, they will be positive if their result is the enrichment of life, the integration of good-will, intelligence, and reverence. By their fruits shall ye know them, whether they are positive or negative.

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

How does Jesus say that men shall secure forgiveness of their sins? By forgiving men their trespasses. How does he say that men become able to see God? The pure in heart shall see God. Whom does he call children of God? The peace-makers are called children of God. Who does he say shall inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world? Those who have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, ministered to the needy. Now come those who say that one cannot be faithful to his Lord or worthy to minister the gospel of his grace to suffering men unless he also believes in some particular theory as to the degree of inspiration of the men who wrote the books of the New Testament and some specific theory as to the exact way in which the death of Christ becomes effective for the salvation of men. And they call this preaching an affirmative gospel!

What shall we say to such a pronouncement, and to the whole series of *quicumque vult's* which men have erected as barriers between man

AFFIRMATION AND NEGATION

and God or between man and his own freedom and intelligence? We shall say, No! No! No! And that negation of a teaching which negatives the whole spirit and content of the teaching of Jesus becomes an affirmation of his gospel.

If religion, then, is to have any continuing value in the life of man, it must be chiefly for what it asserts, not for what it denies; chiefly for what it puts into life, not for what it takes out. To be sure, there must incidentally be the negation of error, the destruction of destructive agencies, and the taking out of whatever takes value and beauty and glory out of life. But the main attitude must be one of affirmation.

On the first Sunday of last year a daily paper announced as the sermon topic for a certain church in Chicago, "Objections for the Coming Year." Presumably "objections" was a typographical error for "objectives," but objections would be nearer right for some churches and some ministers. Neither the spiritual nor the

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

practical life can be nourished on objections. Both require an affirmative content and tone.

The world in our time has some very serious needs which obviously cannot be met solely by political action: needs for peace, justice, social order. Individual lives have equally serious needs which clearly cannot be met solely by the enactment and enforcement of wise laws, or by anything that can be bought with money: needs for inner harmony, comfort in sorrow, tranquillity under trying conditions, peace with efficiency, emancipation from sin and narrowness and prejudice, enrichment and fulfillment, happiness of an enduring sort—in short, salvation, in all the rich meaning of that much abused word. These needs can never be met by a timid and querulous religion dealing overmuch in “objections,” hesitations, and negations. Neither have they ever been met, nor do they give promise of being successfully met, by a religion of theological dogmatism and hierarchical or textual authoritarianism which, under color of preserving the faith,

AFFIRMATION AND NEGATION

provokes revolt and divorces religion from intelligence.

Whether true or not, the affirmations of theology do not connect with the concrete needs of either society or individuals. The question has been repeated a thousand times, Why did not Christianity prevent the war? It may be asked with equal pertinence, Why does not Christianity make happy families, considerate employers, loyal employees, radiant and lovable personalities? Sometimes, of course, it does, but only so occasionally that the result seems almost attributable to accident or to some element which is not included in the formula.

It will not do to answer, as is sometimes done half facetiously, that Christianity has never succeeded because it has never been tried. Whatever partial truth there may be in such a statement, the real meaning of it usually is that some particular program which is dear to the speaker, but which may or may not be essential to Christianity, has not been adopted by the world.

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

Neither will it do to reply, in terms which have become familiar in this age of much preaching of the "social gospel," that the trouble is that we have been trying to Christianize individuals and have not considered the Christianization of the structure and organism of society. The truth is that, in spite of the tardy discovery of the social implications of the religion of Jesus, society is not so much worse now than the individuals who compose it.

There has been and still is a definite and lamentable hiatus between the general principles and objectives of the Christian religion and the concrete results in human life both social and individual, because there has been no adequate coördination of the principles and aims of Christianity with the known or knowable facts of human nature. We have been trying to save both individuals and society by formulæ, words, general principles, by remote objectives, unmediated by means adapted both to the end to be

AFFIRMATION AND NEGATION

realized and to the human material in which it is to be realized.

Historic Christianity and even the teachings of Jesus present ends to be attained and ideals to be realized rather than specific programs of attainment and realization. The assumption that the teaching of correct doctrines, the observance of authorized ordinances, and the employment of proper ritual will produce the desired results, is contrary to the observed facts. They simply do not do it. And the attempt to derive detailed instructions for the organization of society or for the solution of the baffling problems of individual life from the teachings of Jesus and the words of the apostles has never led to anything but a jangle of jarring voices and a *mêlée* of exegetical controversy. Until men learned by experience that slavery did not lead to Christian results, they went on quoting the words of holy writ on both sides of the controversy. Until most Christian people in this country discovered by informal but, in the long run, reasonably ac-

curate research and observation that, under conditions as they are here and now, the use of alcohol as a beverage hinders the realization of Jesus' ideal of character, they continued to cite the advice of Solomon on one side, and the miracle at Cana and the advice of Paul on the other. The state of knowledge on that subject has now advanced to the point where the use of the New Testament against the eighteenth amendment is confined chiefly to those who use it for no other purpose. Similarly, we are in the way of finding out some things about international peace, about divorce, and about the relations of capital and labor. We have known for a good while what kinds of ends we want to reach in these matters, but we are not finding the means to them by the study of texts or by the decrees of councils.

Such a technique of successful living—with the richest possible meaning of success—can be gotten only by the study of human nature, by research, observation, and adventure. But will the way of life arrived at by such a process be

AFFIRMATION AND NEGATION

essentially Christian, even if it is satisfactory from the standpoint of the attainment of the highest ideals? To doubt that is to confess a fatal lack of faith in Christianity itself. Belief in Christianity means belief that it is adapted to human nature. To fear that the best way of living would turn out to be an unchristian, or even a non-Christian, way is infidelity of the most insidious and baleful sort. No other unfaith can be so devastating.

The most affirmative attitude that one can take with reference to Christianity is evidenced by a willingness to have it submitted to all the tests of experience and intelligence. It is no hothouse plant. It needs no protection from the rough winds of criticism or the harsh testing of life.



CHAPTER II

Authority and Experience

THERE is no "war between science and religion," though there is sometimes hot battle between certain scientists and certain religious people. There is no legitimate "war between science and theology," though a state of belligerency often exists between certain workers in the field of science and certain theorists in the realm of theology. There is no "impact of modernism upon Christian faith," though the misleading phrase is sometimes used, but there are hostilities from time to time—quite continuously, in fact—between modernists and others with reference to what constitutes Christian faith and still more in regard to questions which every one knows are not matters of faith. Some of these are earnest controversies. Others are not to be taken much more seriously than sham battles, or

AUTHORITY AND EXPERIENCE

those once popular pyrotechnical representations like Paine's "Siege of Sebastopol" and "Last Days of Pompeii."

There is, however, a real issue joined between two types of mind: the mind that prefers to rest upon authority and the mind that tries to base its conclusions on evidence. Both desire the highest possible degree of certainty, but the first type feels secure only when its convictions are certified as true by an accredited authority, while the second finds no comfort whatever in merely acquiescing in a pronouncement given upon authority but unsupported by evidence. This does not at all amount to reviving under another name the supposed warfare between science and religion. Some of the contestants are the same, but the alignment and the issues are different.

Science tries to keep its feet firmly upon the solid ground of fact, and when it must deal with fields in which the known facts are inadequate in quantity, or in which some of the supposed facts lack complete confirmation, it will project a hy-

pothesis with greater or less confidence, depending upon the quantity and quality of the data, and it will in all cases try to express its conclusions with a degree of positiveness proportionate to the adequacy of the evidence. It is scientifically dishonest—that is, immoral—to represent as proved a theory for which the known facts support only a claim to probability; and it is equally immoral to wave aside as a mere “guess” a hypothesis which is supported by an impressive body of data sufficient to make it vastly more probable than any alternative theory.

There have always been some workers in the field of science who have more talent for formulating brilliant generalizations than for collecting and weighing evidence, and some who are so overwhelmed by the influence of earlier or contemporary opinion that they do not weigh evidence at all but simply conform. It will be remembered that the opposition to Copernicus was not wholly, or even chiefly, theological; he had against him the whole weight of the scientific

AUTHORITY AND EXPERIENCE

opinion of his day. For the most part, the scientific world then was just as inhospitable to his newly presented facts as were the theologians. Science still has its conformists and its nonconformists, these open-minded and eager for all new evidence, those leaning upon the authority of whatever doctrine is popular at the moment. Yet science tends strongly toward reverence for facts and reliance upon evidence.

Religion also tries to build on an assured basis of facts—both facts of history and facts of current individual and social experience. But the interests involved are so vital and the values so transcendent, and men's deepest emotions and most compelling motives become so closely related by association to old theories, forms, and practices, that it is not easy to keep the mind open to new facts. The tendency has therefore been to emphasize authority rather than evidence. Because this tendency is not only not essential to religion but is a positive peril to it, as much as to science, I say that the conflict is not

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

between science and religion, but between the attitude which trusts evidence and that which relies upon authority.

It is failure to make this useful distinction that leads an otherwise intelligent writer to make so grotesque a misrepresentation as this: "It is called modernism . . . because loyalty to it requires us to forswear what was—an attitude made famous of late by the illustrious Henry Ford who boasts of his ignorance of history."

It would be difficult to compress more misinformation about modernism into the same number of words. Modernism does not repudiate the past; it repudiates authority which speaks without evidence. It does not forswear what was; it seeks earnestly and critically to find out what actually was, and to conserve every value which can validate itself today. Its attitude is not that of Mr. Ford, who boasts of his ignorance of history; for, in fact, modernism has been so devoted to history, so interested in the genetic and developmental aspects of ideas and institu-

AUTHORITY AND EXPERIENCE

tions, that its method is commonly called the historico-critical method. The term "modernism" was invented by the Jesuit opponents of that method as applied to the study both of the Bible and of the lives of the saints and other edifying but improbable medieval narratives which were supported by the authority of the church but not by adequate historical evidence.

The distinction between modernist and anti-modernist is not that between unbelief and faith, for there are devout believers in both groups. It is not the distinction between recognizing only material causes and phenomena, and recognizing also the facts of the spiritual life. It is the distinction between belief on evidence and belief on authority.

A shining example of indifference to considerations of evidence is found in an argument by William Jennings Bryan for the historicity of certain miracles. Twenty years ago I heard him present this line of defense for the miracle of Jonah and the great fish: "The only questions

are, *Could* God do such a thing? and *Would* God do such a thing? Could He? Of course. No Christian can deny the power of God to perform any act that is logically conceivable. Would He? Mere man cannot fathom the wisdom or the will of the Almighty or set limits to the divine purpose. Hence we cannot say that He would not. Therefore, we must accept the account as historical."

More recently he supported the virgin birth with a similar type of defense: "Shall we doubt the power of God? If so, we do not believe in God. Or shall we deny that God would want to do what He is reported to have done? Who dares to make himself equal in wisdom with God, as one must if he knows without possibility of mistake what God would or would not do?"

If such an argument proves anything, it proves too much, for it proves everything that any one pleases to assert—every monkish fable and medieval tradition. There is no stopping with Biblical miracles if this sort of thing constitutes a

AUTHORITY AND EXPERIENCE

ground for belief, for the same argument will apply, without changing a syllable, to the suspension of Mohammed's coffin between earth and heaven, to the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius, or to the latest fantastic wonder-tale related by any strolling mountebank of religion.

The fact is that there are not only two pertinent questions, but three: Could God do it? Would God? *Did* God? It is this last that brings us back to evidence, and without this, religion cannot be kept sane and wholesome and in contact with reality.

This brief excursus into the discussion of miracles is merely for the purpose of illustration. The principle has much more important applications in other fields, especially in that of social ethics. Every institution, every custom that is socially approved or religiously orthodox, is an embodiment of wishes and experience, tested in practice, transmitted through the generations, crystallized and perhaps petrified by the accumulation of supporting precedents, and finally

sanctified by age and sentiment. When any such institution or custom is brought to judgment, the primary issue is whether it shall be permitted to validate itself by an appeal to authority, which in the nature of the case bars out frank criticism; or whether it shall be judged on the evidence as to its value historically in relation to the conditions of earlier times and contemporaneously in relation to the needs of today.

The modernist feels that he has something worth affirming about sin and salvation, about the conception of God, about social ethics and personal morality, because experience has provided data sufficient to support conclusions of some definiteness. The conclusions are incomplete in many fields; for example, no one yet knows just what is the most Christian program with reference to international relations, or some phases of domestic relations, or the relations of labor and capital. Because he realizes the limitations of his present knowledge, he will be on his guard against dogmatism. But because he is con-

AUTHORITY AND EXPERIENCE

fident of the validity of his method, of resting his conclusions upon evidence that has been subjected to critical examination, he feels a reasonable security in those results which have been attained. He agrees with the sage who said that it was better not to know so many things than to know so many things that are not so; but he believes that a scientific method applied to the things of the spirit not only saves one from affirming a good many things that are not so, but brings within the range of knowledge so much new truth that the content of his certainty is enriched by the process.

The hope of the future lies in a type of religion, of theology, and of Christian ethics which is perfectly open-minded toward facts—the facts of history and nature and of the moral and spiritual experiences of men—and is willing to weigh and accept new evidence.

And in this connection, while, for what I hope will be the last time in this book, I am contrasting two radically different approaches to religion,

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

I will take occasion to say that the progress of intelligence in matters of religion would be greatly advanced if all men would talk as intelligently as they think; that is, if those who actually base their opinions and practices upon evidence and experience would admit that they do so and not affect to give them a foundation in authority for the sake of appearing to be orthodox. Modern-minded religious men who were lately indulging in a fine frenzy over the anti-evolution prosecution in Tennessee did not learn the full lesson from that amazing episode unless it brought them to realize that they were themselves in large measure responsible for it. They have invited attack by the timidity of their attitude, for evangelical modernism has its temptations to timidity. There are, of course, honorable and notable exceptions, but in general those religious thinkers and leaders who hold a consistent and defensible modern point of view have been far too hesitant to state it in clear and courageous terms. They have been content to find

AUTHORITY AND EXPERIENCE

standing room under the eaves of the sanctuary, tacitly confessing by their timid attitude that the main temple belongs to the traditionalists, and only too well satisfied if they could escape attention and avoid being put out of the synagogue.

Statistics in regard to this matter are naturally impossible to assemble, but one may be permitted to make a rough estimate on the basis of general observation and acquaintance. My guess would be that, out of fifty ministers and religious leaders whose personal views are definitely of a modernist order, less than ten express those views in clear and unmistakable words, while more than forty use ambiguous language which conceals their position. This is doubtless partly, but not wholly, the result of cowardice. A man with a family may not unnaturally shrink from the possible economic consequences of controversy. It is much more frequently the result either of a sensitive anxiety not to disturb the faith of weak brethren or of a kindly spirit of tolerance which shrinks from even the appearance of pass-

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

ing a harsh judgment upon time-honored but inadequate views held by other sincerely religious people. Tolerance is a natural and, when rightly understood, a necessary quality of liberalism. A bigoted liberal is an abomination to the Lord and an offense to sensible men. But tolerance does not require silence or ambiguity. Men, who have found in a free, flexible, non-authoritarian type of religion the thing that ministers best to the needs of men, should proclaim it with apostolic zeal and perfect candor. The danger of shaking somebody's faith usually turns out to be nothing worse than the danger of arousing the wrath of intolerant persons.

Whatever the motive of the over-cautious and ultra-meek attitude, the result of it is to encourage the traditionalists to undertake just such crusades as that which was staged in Tennessee. It is an axiom of military science that the best defense is a vigorous attack. If the men who hold a modern world-view believe that that view is not only consistent with a religious attitude but

AUTHORITY AND EXPERIENCE

is helpful to religion and conducive to the development of the highest type of Christian personality, why not say so with clarity and emphasis? If they have found that the so-called newer view of the Bible—which is much closer to the original view of it than is the sixteenth-century conception of inerrancy—makes it an infinitely more readable, credible, lovable, and livable book, why should they not boldly proclaim the faith that is in them in such terms that their hearers, whether they agree with them or not, will at least know what they mean?

William Newton Clarke somewhere says—probably in his *Sixty Years with the Bible*—that it was the final step in his emancipation when, having long since reached the conclusion that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses, he determined no longer to talk as though he believed that it was written by Moses. Obvious as that principle sounds when thus reduced to its simplest terms, it is precisely what a majority of preachers, whose own thinking is intelligent and

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

modern, do not do. They believe in the Bible as an inspiring and inspired human record of the efforts of God and man to find each other, but they speak of it and use its texts as though it were an inerrant transcript of the divine mind. They believe in the higher criticism as an indispensable process for the understanding of the Bible, but they shy at the word and conceal the process behind pious and ambiguous phrases which leave their hearers still ready to be a prey to the first fanatic who comes identifying higher criticism with infidelity. They believe in evolution in nature and in development in religion, but they talk of creation and revelation in such terms that no enlightenment comes to the minds of those who hear and the very terminology of modern thought remains to them a series of bugaboos.

The immediate result of this policy is doubtless peace and harmony in the local congregation. The larger result is that many thousands of earnest and deeply religious laymen who have never

AUTHORITY AND EXPERIENCE

done much thinking for themselves on these topics have the conviction that these modern views are held only by "infidel scientists," and by a group of rattle-brained radicals in the church. Nor is it surprising that intelligent people outside of the church, interpreting the attitude of its leaders by the face value of their public utterances since they have no other facilities for knowing about it, conclude that the church as a whole is unaware of the progress of scientific thought or is hostile to it. That this is a misinterpretation of the present attitude of the church is well known to those who have access to the facts, and that it is not more generally understood is more the fault of timid liberals than of intolerant reactionaries. If a minister is content to be—to use Shailer Mathews' phrase—merely a "private chaplain coöperatively sustained" and to echo the sentiments of his parishioners in the terms most familiar and least disturbing to them, he has his reward. But if one wishes to perform a service which has in it any valid quality of

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

leadership, then one must assume the risks which are involved in leadership, chief of which is the risk of not being followed.

I am preaching no crusade of modernist intolerance. I have no desire to turn against the reactionaries their weapons of proscription, excommunication, and outlawry. Nor would I encourage that quarrelsome disposition which cannot be satisfied that it is telling the truth unless it is making somebody mad. But I am strongly of the opinion that some of the crises of the present time would have been safely and almost painlessly passed a generation ago if the men to whom the church at large and individual congregations look for guidance in their religious thinking had adopted the policy of speaking the truth as they saw it without reserve as fast as they discovered it.

During the closing days of the World War, when things were going rather badly for Germany—how badly, the rank and file did not begin to know—the high command adopted the

AUTHORITY AND EXPERIENCE

policy, so the Crown Prince records in his memoirs, of "rationing the truth." He adds that he did not approve of the practice; that he thought that the men whose lives were at stake were entitled to know all that anybody knew about the military situation. Certainly it is so in the field of religious thought. Rationing the truth is dangerous business.



CHAPTER III

The Necessity of Belief

FAITH has generally and rightly been considered the foundation of religion. It was Paul's glory that he had "kept the faith." The starting-point of Protestantism was the principle of justification by faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God—or to serve men, or to lead a sane, satisfactory, or successful life in any field.

A faith which is to save men, not by a technical and legalistic justification through the imputation to them of a righteousness which they do not actually possess, but by leading them to adequate and worthy living, must include two elements: It must include the choice of high objectives, the right valuation of the things that are unseen and yet eternal, the acceptance (if it is to be Christian faith) of the ideals which were

THE NECESSITY OF BELIEF

approved and illustrated by Jesus; and it must also include a willingness to assume the risks and pay the price of investigation to find the ways which lead to these ends, and such trust in God and in life as will make a man willing to go pioneering in the kind of world that He has made. It is in this latter sense that faith is a high adventure, calling men to go out like Abraham, not knowing whither he went but seeking a city that hath foundations.

Faith is a matter of laying hold on reality in a confident and practical way. The meaning and nature of reality is a deep question of metaphysics—and there is no colder or clammier word in the English language than that—but it is also a matter of plain common sense. One must every day distinguish between realities and illusions or frauds: between good and bad money, true and false friends, sound business propositions and projects compounded of hot air and blue sky. Religious faith, like business sense, aims to dis-

tinguish between realities and unrealities, to hold fast to the real values and discard the spurious.

Religion deals with a kind of reality which some consider mere moonshine because it does not consist of tangible physical things. But that is a very foolish judgment, for the test of genuineness and reality always involves something more than mere physical solidity. Bad money is just as solid as good; it may even be made out of the same kind of metal. False friends are just as real people—to their butchers and grocers and doctors—as real friends are; it is their friendship, not their humanity, which is unreal. A spurious Rembrandt may have just as much paint and canvas, and just as real and as good paint and canvas, as a genuine one. But it is not as good a picture. It is real as a physical object, but unreal as a work of art.

So religious faith is not altogether different from those judgments of value which we constantly make in everyday affairs. It has to do, just as they have, with meanings. It has a far-

THE NECESSITY OF BELIEF

ther reach but not a different quality. He who looks at a picture does not look wisely or well if he sees only paint; he must see also what the paint means, that is, the picture. He who looks on the face of a friend does not see the significant reality if he sees only a patch of color, or so much flesh and hair; he might as well be blind if he does not read the meaning of those visual sensations so that he becomes aware of the presence and of something of the mood of his friend. He who looks at the facts of life and of nature and sees only the data of physical science, sees much but does not see all that is there. Missing the meanings, he misses the greater realities.

The important thing is to understand that these imponderable elements of life—what I am calling meanings and values—are real, and that one does not have to withdraw to some realm of supposedly supernatural phenomena to find illustrations of that truth. Almost every one has had some experience which has changed his feeling about life, either permanently or temporarily,

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

without either increasing or diminishing his stock of things. He lives in the same house, drives the same car, wears the same clothes, has the same amount of money in the bank, but the color, the tone, the flavor of life has changed. Some reality has come into his world or has gone out of it. It must be a reality, or its coming or going could not make such a real difference. Religious faith, similarly, has to do with the real meanings and values of life, and with those of the most general as well as of the most intimate sort. So faith, which is the apprehension of these meanings and values which are not seen but are suggested by what is seen, is absolutely necessary to the religious life.

The scene was the Sunday morning service at an English church in a European city. The preacher took for his text that crucial question, "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?" but centered his attention wholly on the first three words. His subject was "The Necessity of Belief." He criticized sharply the pernicious

THE NECESSITY OF BELIEF

modern tendency to minimize the importance of doctrine and to assume that ethical conduct and social enthusiasm are satisfactory substitutes for those correct apprehensions of religious truth which are the indispensable basis of the religious and moral life. He quoted "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he"—and a sentence from Carlyle to the effect that when faith grows dim conduct grows unreliable. It was an eloquent exposition, perhaps rather too rationalistic but on the whole impressive and persuasive, of the function of intellectual processes in the determination of practical attitudes.

There is a certain cogency in that line of argument, though modern psychology warns us that a man's beliefs are more often the explanations and defenses of his conduct than the determining factor in it. Belief is wholesome and necessary; good, rugged, whole-hearted belief. No good comes from a vague and non-affirmative faith, or even from the holding of a well articulated body of sound doctrine in a timid and tremulous

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

fashion. Men must believe in saving their own souls, in enriching or lifting the world. Not a critical fastidiousness which exhausts itself in picking flaws in other people's faith; not a chronic indisposition to positive commitment; not a nervous eagerness to whittle belief down to the closest possible approximation to nothing at all; but a virile and liberal (that is, generous) faith in the great realities, is the power that moves mountains and does the work of God in a world of men. I agreed heartily with the preacher as to the need of belief.

Then in the second half of his sermon he proceeded to assert, as though it were an obvious corollary of the above, the indispensable necessity of believing the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed in their every article and phrase. This was the intellectual content of Christianity and therefore the thing that must be believed. Men go to and fro in a foolish and futile search for the "essence of Christianity," when all the while it is laid down there in black and white,

THE NECESSITY OF BELIEF

stamped with the practically unanimous approval of the whole church from the earliest ages. Strangely enough, the preacher seemed to feel that his first thesis was a sufficient support for his second; that if one conceded the necessity of believing something, it must follow as the night the day that that something was the two historic creeds as the final and universal expressions of faith.

I have no disposition to discuss, much less to deny, the correctness of these ancient and honored symbols as formulations of theological truth, but rather to animadvert upon the curious type of mind which concludes that the necessity of believing something carries with it the necessity of believing these. At the bottom of the fallacy is the erroneous assumption that faith is synonymous with the acceptance of certain theological definitions. If it is that at all, it is so much more, and something so much more vital, that that aspect sinks into insignificance. A large section of the church has officially identi-

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

fied faith with the acceptance of the Nicene dogmas for so many centuries that it is hard for the distinction between them to be grasped, especially by those who are impressed by the historic position which the creeds have had in the church but who do not permit themselves to inquire too critically into the history of the formation of the creeds themselves.

But it is not difficult to trace the main steps by which confusion has crept into the use of that noble word. First, there were memorable utterances of our Lord and his apostles in regard to the importance of "faith." Then, references to "*the* faith" and to "the faith once for all delivered to the saints." Both of these later phrases seem to suggest a body of doctrine rather than an attitude toward the leadership of Jesus and the meaning and the adventure of life. That body of doctrine gradually took the form of the "rule of faith," which grew into the Apostles' Creed that is found in approximately its present form as early as the fourth century but in ex-

THE NECESSITY OF BELIEF

actly its final phraseology not until the eighth. Out of the theological controversies of the east issued the Nicene Creed in the fourth century, winning a precarious victory over its opponents only through imperial pressure, but only slowly coming into general recognition and that after rather significant alterations, such as the addition of the *filioque* by the council of Toledo in the sixth century. These statements may be all very well as summaries of theological thought, but certainly they are very remote from anything that Jesus had in mind when he spoke of faith, and they are by no means supported by any real or supposed psychological necessity to "believe something" as a basis for conduct.

There has not appeared in print for many years—not ever, so far as I know—a better brief setting forth of the whole case of the historic creeds, how they rose, why they rose, what they mean, and their present use and value (if any), than is found in the little book called *Creeds and Loyalty*, by seven members of the faculty

of the Episcopal Theological School at Cambridge. It is a rather cautious statement, phrased with due consideration for the feelings of those who have a tender regard for the venerable documents in question, as the authors themselves have. But it shows that the two great creeds contain doctrines which were not believed by some of the New Testament writers, that their contents are irrelevant to the question of loyalty to Christ, that their use in public worship should not be mandatory, and that as tests for admission to church membership they are not so much wrong in detail as completely and fundamentally wrong. Because the church is not essentially a company of people holding the same opinions about religion, but a group with a common loyalty and a common ideal, a test which sets up a series of propositions for the standardization of theological opinion and the exclusion of all variations, is wholly inappropriate, and no talk about the necessity of "believing something" can make this the kind of thing that

THE NECESSITY OF BELIEF

must be believed. In the good words of Bishop Lawrence, "What right has any branch of the catholic church to set up a bar of entrance to the church which is higher than that used by the apostles themselves?"

Certainly one must believe in something. One must believe in God or one cannot pray. One must believe in one's self or one cannot work. One must believe in one's fellow men or one cannot love. Whoever wishes to be saved, it is above all things necessary that he believe in God and man and himself, with an assurance strong enough to be a ground for action, so that he may be able to pray and love and work.

The affirmations of faith are not the mere re-assertion of the familiar formulæ and orthodox definitions of God and Christ and salvation. They concern rather our personal relations to life, our deepest Yea and Nay in the presence of those situations which are of the utmost significance to us, our practical and emotional attitudes in the relations which exist between our-

selves and all the realities by which we are surrounded.

Let it be said again, even if it is a repetition, that faith involves two elements, both of which are present in any single act or attitude of faith. The first is valuation, or appreciation; the second is experiment and adventure. It is by the first that a man has respect for himself and for his fellows, reverences life, loves God, is loyal to the leadership and the program of Christ, sets a higher value on truth, beauty, joy, love and mercy than on the minor goods or the temporary goods or the things that are not good at all but only seem so to the man of little faith. It is by the second that one embarks upon the enterprise of seeking to realize these supreme values. The first involves a judgment of value; the second a program of action. The first is the choice of an end and the conviction that it is worth whatever it may cost; the second is commitment of one's self to the attainment of that end by

THE NECESSITY OF BELIEF

such means as research may discover and experience may approve.

The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews took cognizance of both of these aspects. When he said that "faith is the substance of things hoped for," he was describing faith as the assertion of the reality and worth of certain values. When he cited Abraham as the typical man of faith, going out "not knowing whither he went," he had it in mind that faith starts upon its quests with no detailed map of the country that lies ahead, no ready-made answer to all the problems that will arise, but goes forth adventurous and resourceful, to meet conditions as they arise. Cautious and querulous neighbors in the old home perhaps thought that he was foolish to start on such a long journey with so little knowledge of the region. Whatever divine call had come to him certainly gave him no information as to where he was to camp every night and where he was to find water and grass every day for his flocks and herds. Faith, as a sense of

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

values, showed him the vision of a promised land. Faith, as intelligent adventure, summoned him to use his own skill and experience in finding a way to that land.

Paul counted it the glory of his life that he had "kept the faith." Keeping the faith is not like keeping a hidden treasure, or preserving an heirloom, locked away in dust or laid away in moth-balls. It is not mere obstinacy of opinion. It is not accomplished by refusing to investigate for fear of discovering some truth inconsistent with faith. That is deep infidelity.

Keeping the faith is keeping an unshaken conviction of the reality of spiritual values. It is maintaining a buoyant and expectant attitude toward life, trusting it, with all its uncertainties, as sailors trust the winds and currents of the sea. It is continuing to be interested in the things of the spirit; for those who fall away do not lose conviction so often as they lose interest. It is keeping one's religious attitudes and their formulations in adjustment to growing knowledge

THE NECESSITY OF BELIEF

and experience, so that intelligence becomes the ally and not the enemy of faith. It is conceiving of faith as not merely something to be asserted, but something practical and workable which can be put into operation—and then putting it into operation.



CHAPTER IV

The Increasing Christ

IT WOULD be of little consequence that texts can be quoted to prove that Jesus wished to be remembered by his followers if it were not evident from the whole course of history that the world's insistence upon remembering him is even more urgent than his own desire not to be forgotten. Great men and small alike want to be remembered. It is a quality, not an infirmity, of noble minds, but one which they share with minds that are mediocre or worse. All alike wage conflict with oblivion, but for most it is a losing struggle. Storied urn and animated bust not only cannot call back the fleeting breath; they cannot even perpetuate fame. If it is the last bitterness of the human tragedy to be forgotten, the consummate irony of fate is for a man's monument to outlast his memory,

THE INCREASING CHRIST

so that indifferent observers ask, Who was he and why should he be commemorated by a stone? and find none to answer the question that is only idly asked. Such a marble is a monument not to one's enduring fame but to one's failure to achieve it. Jesus is remembered not because he wanted to be, but because there was in him that which defies oblivion. The world insists upon remembering him.

This is more specifically true of the Christian world. However remote it may be from his spirit and however imperfectly it may represent his principles and carry out his purposes, it realizes that it cannot afford to dispense with the prestige of his personality. Every sect of Christians claims to be nearer to Christ and more loyal to him than any other. A Methodist book arrives in its last paragraph at the conclusion that "the Methodist Episcopal church is the closest copy of the church founded by Christ." The climax of a Presbyterian apologetic is that "the Presbyterian church represents Christianity

as Christ conceived it." A Lutheran book entitled *Why a Lutheran Should not Join any Other Church* finds the answer to that question in the assertion that "the Lutheran church is the old original church of Christ." A Catholic writer, Dunney, in his book on *The Mass*, says: "The difference between Catholics and Protestants is that Catholics believe all the words of Christ, while Protestants believe only what they please." And Wilbur, writing on *Our Unitarian Heritage*, declares that "Unitarianism is simply a return from the corrupted doctrines of orthodox Christianity to the pure religion of the New Testament"—which obviously means the pure religion of Jesus Christ. Quotations are not necessary to illustrate the claim of Baptists and Disciples that they are, respectively, the most loyal followers of Jesus and the truest representatives of his religion.

The point of present interest is not to determine which of these claimants, if any, is justified in its protestations of superior fidelity to

THE INCREASING CHRIST

Christ, but to note that each of them considers that its special apologetic will be clinched and confirmed beyond cavil if it can make good the assertion that it is closest to the mind of Christ, and that the prestige of Jesus is the one indispensable asset for every group of Christians. All alike repeat Peter's boast: "Though all men deny thee, yet will not I deny thee."

In the early days of the ministry of Jesus, during that short period when it overlapped the preaching of repentance by John the Baptist, certain meddlesome persons, who had no real interest in either one of them and only wished to weaken them both by fomenting jealousy between them, came to John and said: "Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him." What a triumph for the opposition it would be if they could arouse in John a feeling of injury toward the one whom he had introduced and started upon his career. It seemed a reasonably possible thing

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

to do, human nature being what it is. So they came, with a plausible show of friendship, and said: This Jesus, who was nobody until you said a good word for him and who owes everything to your support, is stealing your popularity. Your crowd is leaving you and following him. But John, who saw through the trick and understood enough about Jesus to know that he himself was only his forerunner and not his master, replied with a magnanimity which revealed both his greatness and his insight: "This my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."

This brief but comprehensive answer is a sermon in itself. It is a rebuke to selfishness in personal relations, to pseudo-devotion to causes, to institutional arrogance, to sectarian and partisan zeal. Here was a man who believed in his own message enough to proclaim it with all the energy of his soul and presently to die for it, and who could, nevertheless, put his own particular program and propaganda in its proper place of

THE INCREASING CHRIST

subordination to a more comprehensive program.

When one considers the place of primacy which is ascribed to Christ by all types of Christian people and the steps by which he has arrived at his present commanding position in the imaginations of all sorts of men, Professor Kirsopp Lake's classification of Christians into authoritarians, institutionalists, and experimentalists is instructive. The terms are self-explanatory. The authoritarians seek a master whose commands shall be unquestionable, whose utterances shall be infallible, and whose decisions shall be final. The institutionalists—who may also be authoritarians, and who usually are in some sense—demand a continuing organization which shall either be the custodian of the truth that has been authoritatively delivered or the unbroken succession by which the communion of saints throughout the ages is preserved and the traditions of worship and discipline are perpetuated, or both. The experimentalist looks to the future rather than to the past, feels free to dis-

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

card even the most venerable traditions when they become unserviceable and, having decided that certain moral and spiritual objectives are desirable, chooses freely among the available means which give promise of promoting their attainment. Widely divergent as are these temperaments and the practical courses of action to which they lead, the representatives of all of them agree that the figure of Christ has grown more majestic through the passing centuries. Those who are more fully imbued with the modern spirit of free thought and social and religious experimentation are among the first to assert that the spirit of Christ was never so well understood, even though still too little understood, and never so influential in practical ways, though still not influential enough, as it has been since men came to think of him as a friend rather than a king and as the giver of a charter of liberty rather than the revealer of a code of immutable laws.

In the social experience of the Christian cen-

THE INCREASING CHRIST

turies, the conception of Christ has passed through several transformations, each of which has added something to his visible stature and to his moral appeal to men. The first age of persecution saw in him an apocalyptic king, spectacular in his glory, omnipotent in his power to crush his enemies and set his servants upon thrones of victory. There was something almost fantastic in the exaggerated splendor with which the imagination clothed him in that period, as there is in the huge face of Christ among the diminutive figures of his followers as portrayed in some of the early mosaics. Imagination went as far as it could in the exaltation of him in that direction, but it was a direction the possibilities of which were soon exhausted.

The great age of theological formulation sought to advance beyond this merely pictorial representation by giving a metaphysical exaltation to the "eternal Son." He became "of one substance with the Father," "God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God." Is any in-

crease possible beyond that? None that they could think of, surely. They did their utmost. If they could have thought of any titles more exalted, they would have applied them to him. As it was, language creaked under the strain they put upon it, and logic staggered under the burden of reconciling a trinity of personalities with a unity of Godhead.

The age of world-wide monarchy and organization provided the apparatus by which to furnish this King with an earthly as well as a heavenly kingdom. He became the titular head of a visible world-organization, a perfect church, whose power and glory did not await the coming of some distant apocalyptic era but manifested itself in earthly pomp and splendor. The rule of Christ became objectified in a temporal state over which the pope, as "vicar of Christ," exercised specific sovereignty, in a system of ecclesiastical government covering the known world and exhibiting many of the qualities of secular governments, and in the influence—sometimes amount-

THE INCREASING CHRIST

ing to authority—which the church exercised over temporal rulers and over many aspects of political and social life. Christ became the king of earth as well as of heaven. It was a doubtful promotion, but it meant an increase of visible dominion.

With the coming of the modern period, with its new emphasis upon the worth and the rights of the individual man and upon personal liberty and the free exercise of reason, the monarchical ideal of society and of the person and dominion of Christ began to be found inadequate. The revolution was not soon accomplished. Many of its leaders were afraid of the implications of their own positions, and a great fraction of the church resisted the change entirely. The office-holders in the vast world-organization which considered itself the visible kingdom of Christ had vested interests to defend and were firmly set for the maintenance of the *status quo*. The force of habit and conviction was doubtless even stronger than that of self-interest. Rebellion

against the hierarchy seemed rebellion against Christ, and to conceive of him in other than monarchical terms seemed nothing short of treason. But gradually the larger truth came to view, the truth that, in Middleton Murry's phrase, "the secret of the kingdom is that it has no king." Christ came to be seen as a reasonable and sympathetic friend rather than an arbitrary ruler. The slogan of the new age was the rediscovered principle, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." That the figure of Christ had laid aside something of its kingly splendor and that he had ceased to be understood as laying down immutable laws which men had only to obey, is true. But to our modern minds a friend is greater than a king, and a teacher is greater than a lawgiver. Christ has increased even in what seemed the reduction of him to more human terms.

Still another age is beginning to dawn, the age of brotherhood. We do not yet understand its implications and we stand timid and even terri-

THE INCREASING CHRIST

fied in the presence of its possibilities. As at the time of the passing of monarchy and absolute authoritarianism and the coming of liberty and individualism, it is easier to see that old institutions and securities are imperiled than to see that new ones are coming into being which will have both a higher value and a more deeply grounded assurance of safety. But Christ is in this growing spirit of brotherhood, and we shall get on with it best as we discover him going before and guiding the way to its development.

Here, then, are some of the stages through which the conception of Christ has passed. Measured in terms of metaphysical exaltation, kingly pomp and power, and domination over the thoughts of servile subjects, he has decreased. But it is as true of Christ as of any one else that only he who loseth his life shall save it and that humility is the condition of greatness. The progress is apparently downward, but morally upward: a savior by magical sacramental processes; a revealer of exact statements of theological

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

truth; the head of a perfect authoritarian church; the giver of a complete code of moral and ritual laws; a teacher who, like any good teacher, is more anxious that his pupils should develop independent and resourceful personalities and a capacity for finding truth than that they should accept docilely that which is delivered to them upon authority as true; a participant in the struggle of life, tempted in all points, a fellow and comrade in the battle, so rich in his wisdom, so clear in his insight, so inspiring and helpful, that he becomes for us the symbol of all that is noble and pure and brotherly and, in the highest sense, social.

His kingdom is the dominance of these ideals, and that kingdom is increasing. As with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, he has walked with us and we have not known him. But as we have advanced to higher levels of thought and action, always we have found that he was there before us, still leading us on and only seeming sometimes to impede the progress of the race

THE INCREASING CHRIST

because we have so often identified him with our temporary and partial conceptions of him.

The larger triumph of the Kingdom of Christ waits for the increase of Christ in the hearts of individuals. Christianity cannot succeed without Christ, and it must be a larger, a more appreciated, a more sublimely human Christ. It must be a Christ conceived as more interested in the realities of life than in the technicalities of formal religion. It must be a Christ whose essential character can be seen everywhere embodied in people, as his face and figure can be seen everywhere at shrines in Italy and Russia.

John's words, "I must decrease," express the paradox of the spiritual life. With all our valued individualism, there must be a willingness to sacrifice personal preference and advantage, to forget about recognition and thanks, to put away institutional and party pride. The church is against a stone wall unless the reign of selfishness within it can cease. The family and industry are against a stone wall unless personal and

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

class selfishness can cease. Civilization is against a stone wall unless the selfishness of nations can be transcended in a larger interest. Nothing worth while can succeed unless we can get more men and more institutions that are willing to fail in little and personal aims in order that great things may succeed. The success of the great things of humanity is the increase of the Kingdom of Christ.



CHAPTER V

Holy Scriptures

A RELIGION can scarcely survive and function among a civilized and literate people unless it has its sacred writings. Not all religions have an equal need of sacred writings, or need of writings of the same kind. Nature religions and those which make much of ceremonial have other means of self-perpetuation. They dramatize their tenets in visible forms which become to some extent a substitute for written records, but at the risk of permitting a changed and debased meaning to creep into their impressive pageantry and of allowing the symbols to conceal rather than to exhibit the ideas which underlie them. Religions which include a strong ethical or doctrinal interest or an important historical content have much need of writings which shall be considered sacred, though those which stress institu-

tional continuity and the transmission of their teachings by oral tradition may easily allow this to overshadow the writings.

The idea of scriptures is closely connected with the idea of the church. Both emphasize the continuity of religious experience and the value of accumulated wisdom about the highest things. Both are protests against the futility of detached individual efforts to realize the deepest meanings and achieve the loftiest ends of life. Religion must be the product of experience, if it is to be real, but not of any one man's personal experience apart from the experience of the race. Granted that religion is not imported in finished form from another world, but is the product of man's strivings, and that it is through human experience that God speaks and reveals himself to man, still it is not the product of an individual; not of a man, but of men; and not equally of all men. That very idea of social interdependence which the modern mind prizes so highly bids us respect the transmitted heritage of the ages in

HOLY SCRIPTURES

matters of religion. The records of past searchings for God, struggles with sin, seeking for salvation and peace, and achievements of the sense of harmony with life, are a richer asset than all the accumulated stores of scientific knowledge and the products of mechanical ingenuity in past ages.

The deepest experiences, poignantly personal as they are, have a universal quality and are recurrent, generation after generation. If one could but hear over a sufficiently wide area, the sounds of falling clods upon coffins would be as continuous as the roll of surf on a storm-beaten coast. It is the sustaining bass note of life. The opening words of the burial service, "I am the resurrection and the life," have been read millions of times, but they are always the accompaniment of a new sense of bereavement and often of a new grip on faith.

The words of love are old, old words, and all its phrases are worn smooth with much use, but the people who say and hear them are new, and

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

the experience which they express is as fresh and fascinating as though it had never occurred before in the long history of the race. Indeed, it is often believed and asserted that it never has; statements to that effect are a part of the ritual, as well standardized as any of the rest of it. And they are true, for the purpose for which they are made; for if the experience were not new, unique, unprecedented, for those who are having it, if it were not a personal discovery but were merely accepted as the proper thing on the authority of the lovers and poets of antiquity, it would not even be an authentic episode in the line of the great tradition. It must be fresh, personal, self-evidencing, or it does not have the confirmation and support of the authorities. It cannot be the old story unless it is a new story. But if it is truly and sincerely a new story, then it gains richness and depth and cosmic significance from the fact that it is also an old story.

In religion, even the most adventurous souls are deeply dependent upon their spiritual ances-

HOLY SCRIPTURES

try and heritage. Their new experiences must be made out of old materials, for there are no others. And the old materials must be vitalized into new experiences, otherwise their value is archeological rather than religious. The stuff of religion, like the bride's equipment, must include "something old and something new," and they often turn out to be the same thing—something old that is new to us, and something new that is fundamental and universal. That is what churches and scriptures are for, to preserve and transmit that something old which can be transmuted into something new in the uniquely personal experience of successive individuals.

The constantly recurring Old Testament phrase, "and God said," represents a deep truth. A dumb god is no god. A god silent, uncommunicative, non-revealing, would be a god without significance for man. Some men more than others, and all men at some times more than at others, have that awareness of the meaning and purpose of things, of the stern commands of

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

duty and the high transports of joy, which one dare not interpret as less than the message of God.

The conception of scripture is based upon the idea of revelation, but not upon any single definition of it. It implies that God has spoken to and through some men, "at sundry times and in divers manners," so much more clearly than to others that the others cannot afford to neglect the communication which has come through those more open channels. In the unfolding of that implication, men have devised various theories of what it means for God to speak to man. For some it means an audible voice, heard from time to time by a chosen few, dictating to them the text of a communication to be delivered by them to the rest of the world. For others, a mysterious and undefined guidance into all truth, vouchsafed to a score or more out of all the billions who have lived, miraculously strengthening their memories and protecting them from error in the things which they recorded partly from their own natural sources of information and

HOLY SCRIPTURES

partly from the heavenly wisdom which was given to them alone. For still others, revelation means the deliverance of a divine message through human personalities with a resulting mingling of human and divine elements in such a way that, while there may be error in the statements of scientific facts, there can be none in those which purport to give knowledge of the character and purposes of God.

The common factor in these three definitions of revelation is that all of them stress the unique character of a certain body of scriptures, namely, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, with the completion of which revelation proper is assumed to have come to an end. Hence comes the common habit of referring to the Bible as "the Word of God," a phrase which is never used in the Bible to refer to the Bible. It would be impossible, for example, to imagine the psalmist writing "Thy word is a lamp to my feet" and intending to include under that term the psalm which he was then writing.

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

That the Bible is the word of God, that it is a compendium of inerrant documents, that every part of it contains a kind of inspiration which no other writing contains or ever can contain—these are opinions of men and not revelations from God. Those who stress most insistently the distinction between the human and the divine should be the first to recognize that such descriptions of the Bible are solely the products of human opinion.

It was not until the second century that the idea was fully developed that a body of Christian writings could be collected which would stand upon a plane of equal authority with the Old Testament; and it was not until the fourth century that the sifting process was fully completed which finally determined what writings should be included in that collection. The adoption of the Athanasian canon of the New Testament followed the adoption of the Nicene Creed. By that time, the idea of the authority of the church had grown up to such an extent that the author-

HOLY SCRIPTURES

ity of the Bible was obscured before there had come to be any general agreement as to the precise body of literature in which that authority inhered. So there was never a time before the Reformation when the Bible, as we know it, was considered the sole and infallible authority in matters of religion. The "cover to cover" theory, which we still occasionally hear expressed, is a man-made theory dealing with a man-made canon.

The starting-point for any adequate understanding of the nature of the Bible is the realization and frank admission that the Bible is the kind of book that it actually is, and not necessarily the kind that one would like to have it. One must start from a study of the facts, and and not from a theory as to what God *must* have done in order to reveal His purposes to men. To say, as good men sometimes do, that one will have none of it unless it is inerrant, is to take the unwarrantable liberty of laying down the terms upon which one will accept the word of

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

God. Perhaps it has pleased God, in respect of His revelation of religious truth as in other matters of human concern, to require men to use their intelligence in separating the wheat from the chaff, to distinguish between the treasure and the earthen vessel which contains it, to develop some insight and appreciation rather than to practice blind obedience to an authority which is beyond the reach of criticism. If one even suspects that the Bible contains any element of such transcendent value it can be considered a revelation from God, the most elementary degree of reverence for it must require that one approach it with an open mind to discover what kind of book it is, rather than with the simple theory that it must be either the unmixed word of God or else a tissue of frauds and fables.

If one having a wide knowledge of the world's greatest literature were to undertake to assemble from all sources a collection of those writings which, by any practical test, could be considered most valuable for a knowledge of God and for

HOLY SCRIPTURES

the conduct of life, it is inconceivable that the places of primacy in such an anthology would not be given to certain portions of our Bible. Valued solely on their merits, for what they have done and for what they can do for those who will give attention to them, and with no regard to any artificial status that has been conferred upon them as belonging to a "canon" or as having unique authority, these would, by the common consent of all sensitive souls, be acclaimed as the most indispensable part of the literary heritage of the race. But it is equally inconceivable that, on the basis of any such test, the whole Bible would be included to the exclusion of all other writings. If it is certain that passages from psalms, prophecies, gospels and epistles would be almost unanimously judged to be the most valuable documents that human hands have ever written, it is equally certain that there are parts of our Bible which would have to make way for some passages from "uninspired" writers.

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

What then? Do we need a new Bible? The suggestion, made by H. G. Wells a few years ago, that a commission representative of the best intelligence of our time should make a selection of the world's greatest literature of power and knowledge which would become a basis for a new cultural unification of humanity, was much discussed at the time and has been referred to occasionally since, but apparently the project languishes. The very phrase, "a new Bible," which gave piquancy to the original suggestion, operates as a deterrent with reference to actually doing the thing proposed. There are plenty of ambitious and confident persons who would not shrink from writing an outline of almost anything. It is not impossible to enlist a general editor and organize a contributing staff for the preparation of an encyclopedia. Men are willing to set their names to a selection of a five-foot shelf of books or a library of the world's best literature, but when the proposed anthology is described as a new Bible, it calls forth plenty of

HOLY SCRIPTURES

editorial comment, both pro and con, but nobody quite cares to undertake it. Perhaps Mr. Wells himself would be as little likely as any one to be hindered by considerations of excessive modesty, and he admitted that his outline of history was a feeble approach to what he had in mind, but we have seen no announcement of his willingness to take the lead in producing a new Bible. Perhaps there is still lurking in the minds of men more respect for the old Bible, even for the very name of it, than one might sometimes suppose. The collection which Mr. Wells proposes would be very valuable, if it were made as wisely as he hopes it might be; but it would not be a new Bible.

And yet every person who reads the Bible and other religious literature with any regularity is constantly, even if unconsciously, doing something like that for himself. He is selecting a body of material which has validity and value *for him*. He may be one of those who assert that every word of the sixty-six books was dictated

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

by the Holy Spirit, and that these books and these alone have "authority" as sacred scriptures. No matter. He uses only what he *can* use. If imprecatory psalms, or ritual legislation, or genealogical tables, or the records of cruel wars and massacres carried on under the command of God, do not seem to him to be edifying, he may pay lip-homage to them as parts of "the word of God," but they carry no weight with him for practical purposes. On the other hand, he is gradually building up a collection of religious writings, quite "uninspired" but definitely and wholesomely inspiring, in which he finds comfort and guidance, insight and spiritual beauty. The category that counts for most is that of appreciation, not that of authority. That which is appreciated comes to have an authority which needs no apologetic. That which has no appeal except authority cannot maintain even that, for authority can no more build character than it can command love between parent and child or in any other human relationship.

HOLY SCRIPTURES

The fundamentalists, in their opposition to the processes and results of historical criticism, like to represent themselves as the defenders of "the old Bible," and they more than hint that the critics are cutting and slashing the old Bible and are, in effect, trying to construct a new one out of the emasculated fragments of the old. But this is far from the truth. For the critical scholars, with whatever degree of success, are trying to discover the original structure and meaning of the Bible, to find out what kind of book the old Bible really is, to understand and preserve every word of it. They complain that the traditional view is itself far too new, since it represents an accretion of errors and misunderstandings that must be cleared away. Perhaps the settlers on the site of Troy protested, when Schliemann began to dig, that he was destroying their old familiar landmarks and was trying to make a new Troy, but what he really wanted, and what he actually did, was to find the old Troy that had been hidden by the accumulations of the cen-

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

turies. Nobody wants to destroy the old Bible or to produce a new one, but we need a new understanding of the old one and of the place which it occupies among the spiritual assets of the race.

From time to time a new translation of the Bible, or of the New Testament, is presented, and the translator has to meet much the same kind of criticism as that with which the historico-critical students of the Bible are assailed. The old words are familiar. They are beautiful. They are hallowed with associations. They are solemn, sonorous, reverent, rhythmic. They have the dignity, the splendor, the sanctity of a cathedral. Why should any bold iconoclast presume to imagine that we need a new version of the Bible?

Whether we need a new version of the Bible is a question to be answered not primarily on the basis of our personal attachment to the old and familiar one, but by asking first what the Bible is for, and second, whether the present versions satisfactorily serve that purpose. Paul's state-

HOLY SCRIPTURES

ment of the purpose of scripture still seems sound and accurate: it is for teaching, correction, reproof, instruction in right living. It was not intended chiefly for liturgical purposes. It is therefore relatively unimportant whether or not it has the solemn splendor of a cathedral or the rolling eloquence of the loftiest epic poetry. It is above all things necessary that it should be understood and that the ideas which it conveys to the reader today shall be the same ideas that were in the mind of the ancient writer. But an idea can never be accurately reproduced in paraphrase or translation unless the emotional tone, the spirit and personality of the writer are also indicated with some approach to accuracy.

From the standpoint of fulfilling these purposes, the King James version is not satisfactory. It is, to be sure, a wonderful piece of literature, a priceless landmark on the road of the development of our language, and perhaps the most important single factor in that development. But

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

a Bible which impresses one primarily as being antique, sonorous, solemn, different from the language that men use in the common affairs of life, is not best fitted to teach, correct, and reprove. It lulls and soothes by its rhythmic beauty; it aids the worshiping soul by its stately cadence; it stirs the religious emotions through the associations which have gathered around its solemn and familiar words. Much of the same effect, and sometimes more, is produced by reading the Latin version to a Catholic congregation which knows very little of what it is all about, or by organ music. These are effects not to be despised. But they are not teaching, correction, and reproof. They are not the effects which the books of the New Testament at least were designed to produce.

It is perfectly true that one who is accustomed, as we all are, to the King James version with its solemn style and its uniformly dignified and antique diction, finds a certain incongruity in a translation which speaks the language of today.

HOLY SCRIPTURES

But it should be borne in mind that no other kind of translation correctly represents the original. Its language was the language of today, when it was written. Paul and Luke did not write in "the language of the Holy Ghost." They wrote in the language of the Hellenistic Greeks, just the sort of language that would have been used in the news and editorial columns of the daily papers of Corinth and Ephesus if they had had them. The antique flavor of the Bible is a modern innovation. Just as Christian doctrine has picked up accretions of later thought as it passed through the centuries, so the language of the Bible, which started fresh and vigorous and human, has acquired a flavor of antiquity and of unlikeness to the style of other books. The antique style of the Bible is, so to speak, the newest thing about it.

The problem of the translator, then, is to produce a version which will come as near as possible to giving the reader today the same experience which came to the Greek who read these books

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

in the first century in his own tongue, in colloquial idiom, in the very same kind of language in which he was accustomed to hear men discuss earnestly the things they were most interested in. This does not mean plunging from "solemn style" into slang. It is not, as a newspaper writer ignorantly suggested, putting the New Testament into jazz form. Men do not use flippant language in speaking of things which are important to them. There are two kinds of language which are the foes to real reverence. One is the slovenly language of flippancy, of which slang is one form. The other is the pseudo-solemnity of the pompous and holy tone, which often enough conceals mental vacuity or muddles the message. But there is such a thing as straightforward, clear, contemporary, conversational or newspaper English. A translation of the New Testament into that kind of English is true to the style and tone of the original.

What then shall we do with the Bible? Above all, read it. Give it a chance to make its own

HOLY SCRIPTURES

impression. It is not a simple book, but a complicated literature of various degrees of intelligibility and value. Luther held that it was easy to understand because "the Holy Spirit is the all-simplest writer," but he wrote many volumes to make its meaning clearer. The dictum voiced his wish rather than his reasoned conclusion from the facts. It is not a simple book, but it would be simpler if men would approach it with no theory requiring all of its parts to be consistent and equally divine. Parts of it speak no message that is intelligible to plain men of our time or applicable to the conditions of today, and parts of it are luminous with a light which shines nowhere else with such effulgent glory.

The Bible needs no champions. It has not an enemy in the world today. Nobody wants to cut it to pieces or throw any part of it away. Nobody proposes to "throw it in the waste-basket," as some of its self-appointed defenders allege. They are not defending the Bible, but their own theory about it. If some scholars fall

into error in their assignment of dates and authorship, other scholars will correct them, so far as the facts are ultimately ascertainable. The Bible does not need to be defended; it needs to be understood as the kind of book the most competent scholarship finds that it actually is. And then it needs to be read, with humble heart and appreciative spirit, and its highest teachings put to work quickening the minds and ordering the affairs of men, that the word of God may not return unto Him void but may accomplish that whereunto it was sent.



CHAPTER VI

The Church

THE ancient creed declares: "I believe in the holy catholic church" and makes this affirmation with no less assurance than its "I believe in God, the Father Almighty." The modern world sometimes seems not so sure about it, and even the church itself shows more than occasional symptoms of doubting its own legitimacy. Questions arise: What is a church? What is *the* church? Which is the right church? What is the matter with the church, if anything? What should be the attitude of an intelligent and socially moral man toward the church? Can one be a good man, or as good a man, outside of the church? Why should a good man be outside of the church—or inside? What is the relation of the churches to *the* church?

There is still, though less conspicuously now

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

than a few years ago, a tendency to criticize or patronize the church. Moved by an entirely creditable impulse, there are many who profess admiration for Christianity but have little use for what they call churchianity. There is the indubitable fact of the alienation of the proletariat, and the view of the church as a silk-stockinged, capitalistic affair. There are business men who look upon the church either as an impractical and other-worldly institution remote from the concrete interests of life, or as a semi-socialistic organization, dangerously encouraging social liberalism, radical economic theories, and proletarian unrest. The militaristic statesman just now is accusing the church of promoting a suicidal pacificism and an impractical idealism. There is an influential element of the intelligentsia which is not opposed to religion in general, but is opposed to institutional religion. This attitude has the advantage of commanding clever and expert literary exponents, and of lending itself readily to brilliant statement. One recalls,

THE CHURCH

for example, Mr. H. G. Wells' words: "Religion cannot be organized. The church, with its sacraments and sacerdotalism, is the disease of Christianity. Even such organization as is implied by a creed is to be avoided, for all living faith coagulates as you phrase it. Organization for worship, also, is of little manifest good. God deals only with the individual, for the individual's surrender."

There is something attractive about this attitude—its sense of freedom in religion, and its distrust of machinery. To be sure, it suggests some queries, the answers to which might be fatal to the point of view. For example, is it so sure that God deals only with the individual? And even if so, may it not be that the influence of the group is one of God's means of dealing with individuals? Is religion confined to God's dealing with men, or does it have something to do with men's dealings with each other? And if so, may not organization be as legitimate and possibly as useful here as in any other human rela-

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

tionship? But whether right or wrong, these words are representative of an attitude which approves of religion, at least in a general way, but is distrustful of any organization or crystallization of it, on the ground that these processes, which are designed to preserve it and to make it effective, are in reality fatal to the thing itself.

So the church is criticized both for holding aloof from practical problems, and for taking a too-active part in them on the wrong side; both for being too idealistic, and for not being idealistic enough; both for not being efficient, and for organizing in the interests of efficiency.

But the church is also prized and praised and used—more in these latter years than for many decades previously—in connection with many enterprises which are aside from its central purpose. It is a convenient publicity and promotion agency in patriotic causes. It furnishes a choice constituency and a readily assembled audience for the presentation of civic and humanitarian enterprises. Its moral teachings exercise a sta-

THE CHURCH

bilizing influence in economic life. Its missionaries are advance agents of civilization, and therefore promoters of international commerce. The church is somewhat embarrassed by being used as what Dr. Gilkey calls a "moral fidelity and casualty assurance society," and by the assumption that its chief function is to make the world safer for business. However, this is a part of the total modern attitude towards the church. And so it is, on the one hand, criticized for the way in which it performs or fails to perform its specific function and, on the other hand, is valued for the practical utility of certain by-products of its activity.

I believe in the church, in spite of all that can be said in criticism of it, and in spite of much that is said in defense of it.

Many of the difficulties which beset the road to Christian unity arise from differences in conception of the essential nature of the church. Into every man's concept of the church will enter many elements, derived from his religious

heritage, his social setting, and his individual thinking. The connotations of the word "church" are as varied as those of the word "home," and for much the same reason: because it is wrought out of intimate, personal, and, in part, incommunicable experiences. It is of little help merely to deny the validity of the other man's idea of the church. It is the adequacy rather than the accuracy of the varying definitions of the church that is most open to question. Is the church essentially a succession of ministry in unbroken sequence of ordination from the apostles? The dictum "*Ubi episcopus, ibi ecclesia*," has very ancient authority. Or is it a group holding a correct creed, a channel for the transmission of the "deposit of the faith" without corruption or variation—perhaps even without application? One would not like to deny that Christianity has something to preserve and transmit, and that the church is the fittest instrument for that task. Or is it determined by the precision with which its organization and ordi-

THE CHURCH

nances reproduce the model of the apostolic age? Whatever of truth these definitions may contain, each of them omits something which is in the back of the minds of all, or nearly all, of those who affirm them. There is another element, and happily a common one, which may integrate and coördinate these divergent conceptions if the emphasis is laid upon it and not upon them.

If an institution is the lengthened shadow of a man—or the projected radiance of a personality—then the test of a church is akin to the test of the messiahship of Jesus. When John the Baptist asked for assurance as to whether he was the expected one, the only proof that was given him was a report of the things that were being done—the physical, spiritual, and social results of Jesus' ministry. The church of Jesus Christ cannot claim exemption from that test to which the Master himself was willing to submit his claims, nor can it authenticate its validity as his church by any criterion more mechanical or less

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

vital than that by which he gave proof of his office. The test of a church, or of the church, is what it does.

The origin of the church was a very natural and inevitable thing. The experience of the followers of Jesus during his life, and especially through the events of the days following his death, gave them not only a message, but a divine urge for its proclamation and an intimate sense of their own coherence as a group. Jesus had left no book, no organization, and no instructions for either writing or organizing, but something had passed into the lives of the little group, and not the least among those influences was the consciousness that they *were* a group. They knew but little of the future, and what little they thought they knew was mostly wrong. But, united in the bonds of a common enthusiasm, they continued to meet to worship, eat, and drink together, and to give forth the gospel as they had opportunity. The first rudiment of an organization came in response to a concrete

THE CHURCH

social need. More organization followed as the group grew and its needs multiplied. The simple ordinances which were practiced were the representation and the renewal of real experiences. So the church was launched, or grew—for there was nothing so sudden about it as a launching, nor was it something that had been designed and built in advance of its use to be suddenly projected into the element in which it should function. In fact, it was as unlike a launching as anything could possibly be. The things to note about it are: its spontaneity and naturalness, for its whole structure seemed to come from doing the things that needed to be done rather than from attempting to carry out some prearranged program; its unity and comprehensiveness, for it seems that no one was kept out of it who wanted to come in, and no local group which desired fellowship with the whole was excluded; that it was essentially a collection of people and not primarily a “mystical body” owing its churchly character to the fact that it had a

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

given structure or a certain kind of officers; its earnestness, power, and contagion; its imperfections, which were inherent in the human material which constituted it and which weakened it but did not vitiate its character.

The church of today is necessarily very different in some respects from that of the first century. It is farther from its original impulse. It has lost—not its “radiance,” let us hope—but something of its youthful spontaneity and its expectation of an immediate fruition of its highest hopes. It has settled down for a long task. The morning dew which sparkled on its path has dried under the burning heat of noon. It is in the midday period of its life. As Christian influences have permeated the world, something of the sharpness of the contrast between the church and the world has disappeared. It is easier now for men who believe and practice the Christian way of living to stay out of the church, and perhaps easier also for those who do not practice it to stay in. There are Christians (measured by

THE CHURCH

the definitions which Jesus himself gave) outside of the church, and non-Christians inside. But still the work of Jesus has to be done, and the longer the task of realizing his ideals turns out to be, the greater the need of a permanent agency to carry it on. No other agency is carrying it on with anything like such energy and effectiveness.

What is this task of the church? Fundamentally, to teach religion, to transmit the spiritual stimulus and the moral ideals of Jesus. This is not the transmission of a closed and completed faith, but the transmission of life. And to stimulate and buttress individual lives by a sense of comradeship in a great cause; for we need fellowship in our highest ideals; we need the force of moral and spiritual gravitation which men supply no less than God—or which God supplies chiefly through men—to hold us in our orbits. And to embody the social aspect of the spiritual life, which may be nullified by the sectarian spirit in the church but which is equally nulli-

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

fied by individual separatism; for the man who considers himself a Christian but will not join the church because it is divided into sects is himself a sect of one member. And to make Christian ideals effective in the world as it is, to speak with a united voice, to pool the resources of the men who believe in Jesus' way of life against entrenched evils and organized iniquities. The very criticisms of the church for ineffectiveness are an admission that it has a work to do and that an organization of Christians ought to be effective for good.

The institutionalism of Christianity has not been without its drawbacks and its dangers. It is dangerous to organize an institution for any serious purpose. Institutions always develop power and pride, and encourage limited loyalties, and waste a disproportionate amount of energy on minor objectives which are incidental to their real goals. They are nearly always busy promoting themselves. They get entangled in economic necessities and are forced—or think they

THE CHURCH

are forced—to compromise with the *status quo* in order to keep their influence and their income. (This is euphemistically called being “wise as serpents”.) Sometimes they live so precariously on the brink of financial disaster that they can give little attention to anything except self-preservation, and generally, if they are institutions which take themselves seriously, they come close to believing that their own eclipse would be equivalent to the collapse of civilization. Most institutions live too long, for they go on living by the sheer momentum of loyalty and property after they have forgotten the purpose and lost the spirit which gave them birth. They get muscle-bound with too much power when they do not suffer from pernicious anemia because of too little. And they nearly always have hardening of the arteries and of every other organ that ought to be kept flexible and adaptable.

Yes, it is as dangerous for a cause to develop an institution about itself as it is for a man to have a body. Perhaps that is why Jesus said

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

so little about the church and seemed so indifferent to the institutional aspect of religion. Doubtless he knew that a church would come into being—he would have needed to be totally ignorant of the history of religions and the facts of human nature not to have known that—but he was at pains not to overburden it with instructions. It could easily have been anticipated that his most casual remark about it would be erected into an article in its constitution. And yet, although he was so far from being an institutional sort of person, I think he contemplated without dismay the certainty that an institution would arise to carry on his work. For it could not have been difficult for him to realize, as any one can who will contemplate the history of ideas, that the one thing more dangerous to a cause than the paralysis or the perversion of it by an incrusting institution is for it not to have any institution at all. Under present mundane conditions, a body subject to all the diseases, perils, and limitations that accom-

THE CHURCH

pany physical existence is better than no body at all.

Why then should a man who believes in Jesus' way of living be in the church? He should be in it for his own soul's welfare—not for salvation as in an ark, but for the stimulation, support, and strength that come from avowed comradeship in a great cause. He should be in it because the church is bearing the main burden of promoting Christian ideals and if he is for those ideals he has no more right to be out of it than any one else. The church consists of people. No people, no church. To stay out is to vote for its dissolution.

To say, I believe in Christianity but not in the church, is as wise as to say, I believe in justice but not in courts, I believe in education but not in schools, I believe in society but not in government. The church is the one agency whose whole business is to do the work of Jesus Christ in the present world, and to carry it on generation after generation by changing methods

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

adapted to the changing needs of changing times. Its adaptations are never perfect. Its ministers are never completely adequate. Its members are never completely faithful. But even with all the spots and wrinkles which may easily be discerned by the friendly as well as by the critical eye, I believe in the church.



CHAPTER VII

Sin

SIN and salvation are both rather old-fashioned words which at present are not very popular in polite intellectual society. The cultured man turns away from the thought of sin as from a bad odor or a verbal infelicity; and in place of salvation he is likely to use some more sophisticated, and perhaps more specific, term. Jesus himself, in fact, showed no great fondness for the word salvation. He preferred to use more vivid and pictorial expressions for the attainment of blessedness, such as seeing God, being called children of God, or inheriting a kingdom.

He had, however, no hesitation about speaking of sin, in spite of the fact that current usage tended to attach the term to technical infringements of a code that was in large part arbitrary and unrelated to character or personality. Many

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

of the things which his most righteous contemporaries classified as sins did not disturb him at all: such things as plucking heads of wheat or doing a deed of mercy on the Sabbath day, or eating without previously making a ceremonial ablution, or associating on friendly terms with the outcasts of society. What he proposed amounted to nothing less than the establishment of entirely new tests by which to determine what constitutes sin and what sort of person is a sinner, as well as a new view of what is the attitude of God and what should be the attitude of good men toward sin and sinners. But all of this, radical as it was, involved no complacency toward sin. Still less did it involve the abandonment of it as a necessary category for the description and evaluation of conduct. Sin was very real to Jesus.

It is reported, on the authority of the poet, that in King Arthur's banquet hall at Cameiot there were four sculptures:

SIN

In the first, beasts are slaying men;
In the second, men are slaying beasts;
And in the third are warriors, perfect men;
And in the fourth are men with growing wings.

This scheme of development represents man as rising gradually from a stage where he is at the mercy of beasts to one in which he triumphs not only over the beasts which lurk in forest and fen and over the human enemies who beset his path, but over the beastliness within and the enemy that is a part of himself. It is a long process, and it will go on in society only as fast as it goes on in individuals. We are still far from the end of it, and so long as we are, sin is not a dead issue. Men's conceptions of consummate blessedness and supreme achievement may and must change, becoming less mechanical, materialistic, and selfish; but so long as faith and hope remain, salvation in some form will be the primary interest of humanity and sin will be the chief obstacle to its attainment.

There are many reasons for the present-day

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

obscuration of the sense of sin. The world at large has lost interest in the concept of original sin, which has been one of the main preoccupations of theology since Augustine. Sin conceived as a damning burden of inherited guilt—not merely a congenital weakness which makes it difficult to resist the baser impulses, but such a defect that it is impossible for the natural man to do anything pleasing to God, and such guilt that God may justly punish even a babe dying before the taint has been eradicated by the cleansing waters of baptism—this theory has not only ceased to command the approval or the serious consideration of men, but has helped to discredit the whole idea of sin. Mr. Chesterton has employed his genius for paradox by coining the statement that “the glad good news brought by the Gospel was the news of original sin.” It took from all men after Adam the personal blame for their sins; it relieved God of the responsibility for man’s villainy by concentrating the blame upon the original sinner; and the

SIN

church provided a sacrament by which this burden of guilt could be conveniently and almost mechanically disposed of. However badly the people of our own time may behave, it is evidence of some increase in the sanity and sensitiveness of their moral judgment that they refuse to be comforted by any such gospel of original sin; but many of them have not sufficient moral sensitiveness to realize that abandoning that particular doctrine of sin does not do away with the fact of sin.

The modern tendency to describe man in biological and sociological terms as the product of heredity and environment, while contributing nothing to the rehabilitation of the notion of original sin in the theological sense, has had the effect of diminishing the sense of personal accountability. Our delinquencies are misfortunes rather than faults. The never-failing insanity defense in a murder trial is analogous to the defense to which we all have recourse with reference to our own conduct. We are not sinners;

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

we are victims of circumstances, or sufferers from a contagious disease through no fault of our own. This socializing tendency, justifiable in the main, has blurred the consciousness of personal culpability and robbed sin of its sting.

The decreasing other-worldliness of both religion and life has likewise seemed to leave sin a rather abstract and uninteresting theological concept. Spiritual health appears to be identified with respectability, conventionality, social usefulness, even with prosperity. With this present world occupying all of the foreground and nearly all of the background of their thought, "nice people" do not find much use for the idea that they are sinners, and the application of that term to other nice people seems to be itself something even worse than a sin—a social blunder.

Here again, as in the case of original sin, the current attitude is in part the result of a reaction from ideas which have been found to be untenable. The patent inadequacy of a conception of

SIN

sin which made "dancing, card-playing and theatre-going" the three chief "works of the devil," by the doing or not doing of which the children of light could be most easily distinguished from the children of darkness, has left certain minds with a complacent feeling that the harsh term, sin, has no application whatever to any matter of individual behavior. A humanistic view of religion leans toward the description of misdeeds as phenomena of ignorance, cultural crudity, short-sightedness, bad judgment, or social maladjustment, rather than as sins. And yet I venture to believe that, while the humanistic aspect of religion must be recognized as of the utmost importance, if religion is to be anything more than a species of magic for securing blessings which are unrelated to character and personality, the conception of sin must be kept vivid and terrible.

There are many types of reprehensible conduct, and the same specific acts may be reprehended from different points of view. There

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

are crimes, which are injuries to organized society so direct and overt that the state itself undertakes to punish them. There are torts, injuries to individuals of which the state takes cognizance and for which it provides legal remedies, but about which it does not concern itself except to provide the judicial machinery by which the injured party may get satisfaction. There are acts of bad manners, by no means a light matter; for between the field of legal obligation and that of purely personal option lies an area of conduct within the limits of personal liberty with restrictions only of good taste, fine honor, and a sense of the fitness of things. It is within this field beyond and above the constraints of law, that the beautiful graces of character have room to develop. And there is sin, which is wrong-doing conceived as an offense against God; that is, as involving a fundamentally wrong attitude toward the highest general good, disloyalty to the essential principle and structure of the moral universe. Sin is anti-social

SIN

conduct viewed as a breach of fellowship with God. Naturally this concept can have validity only with those to whom fellowship with God connotes a real experience. If God is a shadow, sin becomes a mere figure of speech. If belief in God is robust and positive—I do not mean to imply that it must be anthropomorphic—the idea of sin will have reality enough to enable it to function in the moral life.

It has been said that there are never any new sins, that they are all hackneyed and stale. This is not quite true, for every increment of intelligence and every new phase of social interdependence provides new opportunities for disloyalty in new relationships. There are, to be sure, the old jungle sins, the sins of the flesh, murder, lust, and theft. Jesus never condoned these gross and obvious sins, but he did not expend the heat of his indignation upon them. He reserved that for the subtler sins of the spirit, pride, avarice, slander, spiritual self-sufficiency, the attitude which we call Pharisaism—with some historical

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

injustice to a group of men who had too many virtues fully to deserve to be thus pilloried above all others.

Besides all these, the increasing intricacy of the organization of society and the advance of democracy have made possible a new and characteristically modern type of sin which may be called long-distance sin. It is an injury selfishly done to people whom we never see or know. We are involved in wider circles of obligation and loyalty than our ancestors and may kill without contact and rob without violence. Akin to these are the sins based upon a mere percentage of probability. The man who builds a fire-trap tenement house, or sells bad milk, or leaves dangerous machinery unguarded in his factory, or drives his automobile recklessly, has no specific malice against any individual and does not know that any particular person will be injured, but he accepts the possibility of such injury as the condition of his own pleasure or advantage, and percentages of probability in the aggregate

SIN

amount to certainties. With ten thousand reckless drivers in a city, no man can say which driver will kill a child or which child will be killed, but it is certain that some driver will kill some child. The total statistics for such killings for a month can be written up almost as accurately on the first day of the month as on the thirty-first. No one can predict who will be the victims when the typhoid rate increases on account of bad milk or when the supply of ice fails, but it is as certain that these events will cause deaths as it would be if some deliberate murderer selected his victim and used an ax.

The very resources which should minister to comfort and security present dangerous temptations, and every advance of civilization, with its improved mechanisms for the attainment of ease and comfort and the enjoyment of pleasure, brings new dangers. Pleasant situations and luxurious living do not put the soul in heroic mood, and the enemy attacks when the armor is laid aside. Moral energy is perhaps more often whit-

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

tled away by trifles than overwhelmed by gigantic temptations. A preacher—I have forgotten who—quotes the text, “The forest devoured more people that day than the sword devoured” (II Sam. 18:8), as describing a situation in which the place of refuge and shelter was more deadly than the field of battle. Men were entangled in the branches which should have been their protection, as Absalom was on that same day. The very situations in life which look good, and which in their possibilities are good, present the dangers which are inseparable from ease, comfort, and idleness. In the modern world men are as often entangled in pleasant woods as lost in noisome and terrible jungles. They are more often attacked and demoralized by gnats and midges than by lions.

The first great moral lesson that humanity learned was that the law of cause and effect is operative in human life, that events do not merely happen in arbitrary or random sequence, but that causes produce consequences. This was

SIN

the meaning of the Greek tragedies, and it was man's greatest discovery. But it is equally important to know that there are remedial agencies and processes. There is forgiveness. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses," and said, "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." The creed says, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." This need not be interpreted as an arbitrary exercise of judicial or executive clemency; it is the operation of an eternal principle which is a structural factor in a world whose creative and sustaining principle is love.

Sin is not a trivial or a humorous matter. It is both real and serious. It is not to be waved away as imaginary or unimportant. It is as real and serious as are the spiritual values which it threatens to destroy. There are ways out, but they must be earnestly sought and intelligently followed. We realize that bad social conditions will not right themselves by a general process of social evolution without definite programs of

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

betterment, and one cannot complacently assume that the wrong state of individuals will grow right without effort. The remedial word is repentance. This does not mean a morbidly minute study of the pathology of conduct, but the correction of the whole point of view of life, the abandonment of the self-centered system as completely as the geocentric view of the solar system was abandoned when the heliocentric view was shown to be true, and the correction of conduct on the basis of an intelligent consideration of the facts of human nature.



CHAPTER VIII

Salvation

SALVATION, like sin, is a term with a disagreeably theological flavor. And yet, believe it or not, they both represent very important realities. Theology deals with things that are most important, if they are real at all. It chooses them because they are important, and in its anxiety to give a complete account of them it weaves about them a tissue of theories and technicalities until the plain man gets tired of theology and all its concepts and sets them all down as a complex of vague verbiage and unreality. It is doubtless true that the majority of intelligent men today are not greatly interested in salvation considered as a fixed and final status to be determined at a Day of Judgment—a “great and terrible day of the Lord.” It might be better for them if they were, but they are not.

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

Yet they are interested in attaining the actual goods of life—not merely goods in the crude materialistic sense, but those things which are good—and in avoiding the things which diminish the tide of real life and tend to defeat its major and better purposes. Define salvation in such terms, and they are interested.

One trouble with the more technical theological conceptions of salvation is that, elaborate as they are, they are far too simple. Any formula that is simpler than the material with which it deals is probably not true; and life is not a very simple matter. "Lost" and "saved" present a falsely simple classification, if taken in their simplest and crudest sense. That program seems to call for the waste and destruction of too much human worth, and for the conservation of too much useless material. A young preacher of limited training, who was telling of his experiences in a church in a little Western town and particularly of a certain cantankerous deacon who was harsh to his family, niggardly with his

SALVATION

money, tricky in a bargain, quarrelsome in the church, and without public spirit in the community, ended by saying: "Still, I think he is a saved man." If he is saved as he is, all his meanness must be saved with him. It is that sort of shallow talk about salvation that brings the very word into disrepute as though it were a mere piece of cant.

Historically, the idea of salvation has passed through many phases. For the earliest Jewish Christians it involved the setting up of a messianic kingdom with a spectacular triumph of the "true Israel." That request on behalf of two of the disciples, that they might sit one on the right hand of the throne and the other on the left, was no figure of speech but represented an expectation of actual and imminent glory. To thousands in the first century, salvation meant deliverance from the power of evil men and evil spirits, accompanied by a vast cataclysm in which Christ was to return in bodily form through the skies and destroy his enemies and the whole

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

physical world, and take his saints to reign with him in glory in a new and heavenly city. No wonder those who still cherish a similar expectation have so little difficulty in finding confirmatory texts; the idea was widely current when the books of the New Testament were being written.

To the Greek mind, influenced as it was by oriental cults, salvation was the change of this corruptible human nature into the likeness of the perfect divine nature through the magic potency of the holy mysteries. The secret of it lay in the mystical identification of the saved with the savior. This is not an easy idea to grasp. Naturally, if it had been, the term "mystery" would never have been applied to it. And the specific process by which this inner transformation is to be accomplished is, of course, quite beyond hope of understanding. And yet, if one can assume that somehow that identification of essences takes place, there is a simplicity about that formula for salvation that is very comforting when compared with the tedious and trou-

SALVATION

blesome procedure of conforming a whole life to some pattern of right living.

The medieval Catholic thought of salvation as deliverance from the purifying pains of purgatory and the undying fires of hell by virtue of a salutary power originating in the death of Christ and mediated to men through the sacraments of the church. Since the sacraments were ministered by the church through the consecrated hands of priests, the hierarchy enjoyed a complete monopoly of the means of salvation, which was conditioned, naturally, upon union with the one visible church and obedience to its commands.

It is as easy to caricature this system as it is for its admirers to idealize it. It had its merits. At best, it was a useful instrument of social control; at worst, an instrument of spiritual tyranny. In actual practice, it nourished an idea of salvation which emphasized escape more than attainment. Judged by the records which seem to give the fairest picture of the attitudes of its

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

average, or even its better than average, adherents, it seems to have made the fear of hell a more effective motive than the hope of heaven. In fact, the celestial joys so lacked intrinsic appeal to the imagination that they needed to be heightened by contrast. It was the great St. Thomas Aquinas himself who said: "That the saints may enjoy their beatitude more richly, a perfect sight is granted them of the punishment of the damned." From which it also appears that while the medieval church represented an extreme form of social solidarity and institutionalism, the medieval conception of salvation was individualistic to the last degree.

The first generations of Protestants—followed in this respect by many of their theological heirs and descendants to this day—conceived of salvation itself as in no wise differing from what medieval Catholicism had held it to be. Purgatory vanished, but the picture of heaven and hell remained unaltered. The difference lay in the means by which salvation was attained. "Justi-

SALVATION

fication by faith" was Luther's solving formula. But more specifically, the process of securing salvation consisted in securing a verdict of not guilty for men who, as a matter of fact, were guilty before the tribunal of God's justice, because the vicarious sufferings of Christ had already paid the penalty for them, their sins had been taken over by him, and these benefits had been appropriated by them through the act of faith in him as Messiah and Savior. The analogies were all drawn from the courts. Salvation was a process of criminal jurisprudence. The chief prepossession of the theologians of the age was with the thought of the divine government, which was that of an absolute sovereign whose own glory was the supreme end for which both his government and his kingdom existed. The message and mission of Jesus as described in the gospels were reinterpreted in the terms of contemporary judicial procedure and contemporary ideas of government.

I am trying to avoid, so far as possible, that

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

pattern of thought which consists in stating what men "can no longer believe," but in connection with an historical survey of this sort it seems necessary to say that some of these conceptions, while not without their elements of truth and their edifying uses, do not commend themselves to men of modern religious minds. That salvation is something that can be gotten by the quasi-magical method of sacraments considered as *opera operata*; that it results from the sole act of an arbitrary monarch; that it is a condition of mere *status*, resulting either from the decree of a ruler, the verdict of a judge, or the fulfillment of "conditions" which are without ethical value; that it is so completely an individual matter that a saved saint in glory will be wholly indifferent to the fate of the damned, even if they are his nearest friends and relatives—these are ideas which simply pass out of the picture when the modern man considers what it means to be saved.

The chief thing that has made the change, I think, is neither a theological nor a philosophical

SALVATION

concept, but a very simple discovery about human nature—the fact that physical force or its equivalent never produces the effect upon personality that is intended by those who apply it. Let us forget about theological salvation for a moment and consider some of the data of common experience, and then come back later to see what bearing this may have upon religious ideas.

The idea that the human mind can be controlled and that conduct can be satisfactorily determined by the application of physical force, or by threats of force, is one of the most persistent delusions to which men are heir. It is shared by many and diverse classes—by statesmen, jailors, teachers, parents, and the mob-minded persons who compose the self-appointed vigilance committees which practice the defense of virtue by resort to crime and the enforcement of law by lawlessness. A Florida sheriff, protesting against legislation which would curb the practice of the flogging of misbehaving citizens by volunteer committees, is quoted as saying: "If

whipping is ended, the rule of the shotgun must follow. I will not stand for any condition that imperils the sanctity of the home." According to this eminent authority, the only bulwarks of the sanctity of the home are the lash and the shotgun. Unfortunately, there seems to be the least sanctity where these saving instruments are most freely employed. A Southern legislator, commenting gloomily upon a law recently enacted in his state prohibiting the whipping of prisoners, said: "It's no use. The only way to handle them is to flog 'em."

The same principle finds its advocates and practitioners in the school and in the family, though fewer than formerly. A recent book of advice to teachers and mothers has these choice bits of pedagogical method: "The first lesson that a baby should be taught is, Stop—don't touch! Ready and unquestioning obedience is a prime essential. When the boy, after being duly warned, does not get dressed on time, surprise him with a switch on the bare skin. If he knows

SALVATION

that this may be expected, you will see a modern miracle worked." After some further directions for the inculcation of obedience, it is added: "When he has learned to obey readily in minute matters, he will not oppose his will to yours in more important ones." Is it so, indeed? Unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately for the total good of the race—that is exactly what he will do. Thwarted in the trivial and obvious matters, he will assert himself in deep and fundamentally important ones.

Perhaps we ought not to be greatly surprised that this theory that human beings can be beaten or terrorized into good conduct is so widely current, when we reflect that much of the popular thinking about the operations of divine providence during the past centuries credits the Deity himself with knowing no better method of influencing human conduct than just such tactics, practiced on a large scale and backed by omnipotence. Or if He is credited with knowing and even preferring a gentler method, it is still main-

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

tained that in moments of special stress or when gentleness fails He must resort to violence. A loved child is taken away—"because God is jealous" of the affection lavished upon it. We do not hear this very often now, but it was once common enough, as almost any person over the age of fifty can testify. What an incredible insult to the intelligence as well as to the virtue of God; as though a suitor would be better loved after he had murdered his rival! Or a disaster at San Francisco or St. Louis or in Florida occurs because the divine patience is exhausted and, despairing of the gentler means of grace and the persuasions of love and reason, God must resort to the more effectual weapon of violence. Or the Great War is interpreted as a purifying punishment inflicted by outraged divine justice upon a world which had waxed so old in sin and unbelief that nothing could turn it into better paths but the killing of ten million men—mostly the young and comparatively innocent. If God considers violence more potent than mercy, and

SALVATION

scourging more persuasive than love and reason, so that He must have recourse to the former when the latter fail, why should we not do the same? Can a people be expected to rise to a higher moral level than its God?

Yet these instances of the prevalence of the cult of violence already seem grotesque anachronisms. That delusion has not gone—witness our armaments!—but it is going. Dismiss the other illustrations and consider only the one which has to do with parents and children, for that is the closest parallel to the relations of God and men. No father ever yet flogged a child hard enough to compel the child to love him. No cudgel was ever stout enough to hammer the love of virtue into a child's mind, though it may make him fear to practice specific vices when there is danger of getting caught. Multiply the weight of the cudgel and the power of the arm behind it by infinity, and the result will be the same. We have learned that the purpose

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

of education is not to produce a certain external pattern of conduct but to develop certain internal qualities of personality, and we cannot believe that God is satisfied with any more superficial results than those which a parent or teacher of average intelligence desires.

If it is true, then, as a general fact of human life, that the desirable objective is the development of personality values and that this cannot be done either by force or by threats, or by any other means except those which have a real and beneficial influence upon personality, the whole idea of the nature of salvation and the means by which it is to be attained must undergo a radical reconstruction as compared with those historical conceptions which have been described. No act of sacramental magic, no exercise of omnipotent power, no judicial exoneration of a guilty man on the ground of the innocence of some one else, can produce such an effect by a divine *tour de force*, though sacrament, grace, and atonement

SALVATION

have their uses as influences upon the characters of men.

Yet men have a very real need of salvation. There are deep moral antagonisms in man which can be resolved only by help from without becoming a power within. Laws cannot do it. We have laws against everything from murder and arson to obstructing the sidewalk; but all of these things get done. Men need moral stimuli, patterns of right attitudes, and companionship on the road of right living.

Salvation consists in the attainment of a desirable type of personality and satisfactory relationships with other personalities. Definitions are vain things and they can be used with impunity only with the understanding that—as in the case of Sandburg's "thirty-seven definitions of poetry"—there is an unlimited number of other definitions of the same thing which may describe it just as well or even better. But for the present I suggest this definition of salvation because it

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

recognizes the two factors which seem indispensable: personality and companionship.

Personality includes character—the possession of those strong sustaining qualities which, like the structural members of a tall building, constitute the framework of the edifice and hold it up—and something else in addition. Something more will be said about this in the chapter on “Virtues and Graces.” When one has attained the virtues of character and the graces of personality, one has already secured the first half of salvation. This is, quite evidently, not a matter of acquiring status or getting into a certain place or escaping punishment. “Divine justice,” says George Cross in his book on Salvation, “does not deliver man from the consequences of wrongdoing in any other way than by delivering him from the doing of wrong. . . . To be made Godlike in character, to be made Christlike—that is justification, forgiveness, sanctification, reconciliation.”

SALVATION

Every influence which clarifies our moral insight, stimulates our better purpose, and buttresses us in the maintenance of them, is a means of salvation. Of these, incomparably the greatest in the experience of the Western world has been the life and character of Jesus and the acceptance of him as a true representative of the character and the love of God. Salvation through him is no trick of magic, no technical escape from condemnation by a clever judicial device which secures an acquittal where a conviction is due, but being transformed into his likeness by the power of his example and the contagion of his personality.

There is deep meaning in that statement, "Whosoever sins ye forgive shall be forgiven, and whosoever sins ye retain they shall be retained," which Protestants have often so nervously avoided and upon which Catholics have reared such a towering structure of institutionalism. But it is not the charter of a great institution for

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

the administration of a fund of merit and forgiveness; it is the statement of a universal human fact. Forgiveness comes not on compliance with a series of arbitrary "conditions" in accordance with a mechanical "plan of salvation," but by the reincorporation of the erring one into a community of love and good-will. It is in this way that the church becomes a saving institution, in so far as it is one. It is the most significant group in which the love of God is mediated through human personalities to those who need it most. Something of the sort that the church undertakes to do, and in innumerable cases actually does, is essential to the attainment of the highest objective in life, for blessedness involves not only the achievement of certain qualities in the individual but also the establishment of relations of comradeship with congenial spirits.

That, I judge, is what heaven means, whether here or hereafter. There is ground for faith that such a salvation begun here may be continued in a larger and a longer life. But there, as here,

SALVATION

it is no sitting upon thrones, no haughty triumph over enemies and looking down with complacency upon the punishment of the less virtuous, but a victory of love and gentleness over the baser impulses and the exercise of friendship upon the highest possible level.



CHAPTER IX

Virtues and Graces

THE central theme of the higher religions throughout the ages has been salvation. It is necessarily so for any individual or group which has achieved any amplitude of appreciation of the possible heights and depths of life. Salvation has many meanings, from the crudest to the most refined, but, however conceived, it must be a theme of central importance because it is a matter of life and death to the soul. It may seem a lapse to the level of triviality to speak in the same breath of mere graces, as though one were turning from an unfinished consideration of character to talk of etiquette. But it is not so, for even the graces are not superficial to character but integral with it. John Wesley's dictum that "cleanliness is next to godliness" has such a Biblical sound that it might at least be easily mis-

VIRTUES AND GRACES

taken for a quotation from the "epistle of straw." It is a sententious expression of the principle that the things which make one a gentleman are not altogether remote from those which make one a Christian.

The graces correspond to ornament and symmetry in architecture, while virtues are the sustaining members that carry the load. If it happens that the purpose of the edifice is as much to be beautiful as to hold up a roof and keep out the weather, symmetry and ornament may be no less essential to the fulfillment of the total purpose than structural integrity. But graces, like ornament, may be either good or bad.

It is sometimes said that all applied ornament is bad. But this is not true. Good ornament may be either structural—the beautiful and imaginative treatment of necessary elements in the building, like the flying buttresses of a Gothic cathedral, or the mosaic pavement of an old Roman church, or the carved beam-end of a Mexican adobe house, or the intricate capital of

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

a column in a Romanesque cloister—or it may be a flowering out of the spirit of the builders in decorated surfaces, like a Moorish arabesque, or a carved choir screen, or the reliefs in the frieze of a Greek temple, or a frescoed wall in an Italian church. These latter are “applied” with reference to the building, but “structural” with reference to the builders.

Graces, too, like architectural ornament, may be either structural or applied. They are applied when they are mere surface decorations designed for the concealment of inferior materials. Did Jesus ever utter a harsher word than “thou whited wall”? What epithet ever came from his lips that so blistered as it fell? It might stand as a sweeping and desolating judgment upon superficial decoration as a substitute for structural sincerity. The forms and words of courtesy divorced from a content of kindness; the formulæ of faith used to conceal a fundamental attitude of cynicism or bitterness or self-righteousness; the livery of heaven stolen to serve

VIRTUES AND GRACES

the devil in; tottering masonry tricked out with stucco and paint to simulate a stability and safety which it lacks—all these come under a common condemnation. They are whited walls.

But graces may also be structural. There is no absolute separation between them and the most stalwart and indispensable virtues. The architectural analogy still holds, for beauty in a building is not something that is added to it after it is built, but consists largely in a beautiful way of doing those things without the doing of which there would have been no building at all. If one is graceful in physical person, the quality is exhibited not by the performance of a special set of graceful acts, but by the graceful performance of all the ordinary and necessary movements of normal life. So the graces of Christian character are shown in the way in which one exercises one's virtues. A genuine grace is a virtue made beautiful and lovable.

The very existence of beauty in human personality and in the world as a whole is a revela-

tion of one side of the character of God. The world is brimming with superfluous loveliness which is, in some real sense, the most necessary thing in it. Only a little of it can be explained on any ground of biological utility. The biologists tell us interesting and doubtless important things about the function of decorative plumage in male birds and brilliant coloration in flowers which must attract insects to assist in their fertilization; but the plainer species seem to get on reasonably well from generation to generation, and so do even such extreme specimens as the wart hog and the hippopotamus. Beauty is not biologically indispensable. And what of the colors on sky and sea, the scarlet and gold of October forests, blue shadows on the snow, opal and amethystine hues of a desert twilight? Surely the God who weaves for himself such a garment must feel both pity and embarrassment when His nearest kinsmen in the universe express their characters in tactless virtue, in awkward honesty, in unlovely temperance, in ungracious justice.

VIRTUES AND GRACES

Grace always involves a sense of abundance, even of superabundance. It means strength and skill enough for the task, and some to spare; virtue enough to live honestly, and enough more to do it without seeming strain; justice enough to give all men their due, and something over; love enough to serve and give, and enough besides to do it gladly—St. Paul says “hilariously”—without being too much impressed with the consciousness of one’s own generosity. Grace is that sort of generous thing, free and outpouring from hidden springs, like a fountain. There is no law compelling it; if there were, it would be ruined. St. Paul himself says, in that famous passage on “this grace also,” that “I speak not by commandment.”

So no man will be saved for possessing graces, or damned for the lack of them. But they represent the margin between bare salvation (whatever that may be)—a passing grade, to speak in academic rather than the customary judicial terms—and an abundant entrance into the best

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

that life affords. It would be incredible that God should know less about human nature than an ordinary college faculty, and every faculty knows that students would not do their best work if there were but two grades—passed and not passed. There are honors to be gained, Phi Beta Kappa and *magna cum laude* and honorable mention. There are some who just get by on commencement day and are duly presented as "*bi juvenes excellentes*" and get degrees and diplomas on the least possible investment of intellectual effort, while others do more than they had to do, and become richer in knowledge and culture than they had to become. Perhaps salvation is something like that.

There are some things that a man must do; law and honor require it. There are others which a man must not do; law and honor forbid. But there is a mid-region of freedom in which neither the commands nor the prohibitions of the law nor the regulations of the code of honor are operative. Within this area lie the things which

VIRTUES AND GRACES


no man can be criticized or condemned for doing or not doing; but the doing or not doing of them reveals the degree of fineness of his spirit. This is the region of the "second mile" and the "cloak also." This also is the field for the operation of the graces rather than for the performance of duties. No command can enforce cheerful generosity or tactful courtesy. If they come at all, they must come, like the quality of mercy, without constraint.

To give and forget it; to help a person without putting upon him a humiliating bondage of enforced gratitude, and thus to give opportunity for gratitude also to become a freely exercised grace; to acquire and use the kindly art of setting at ease people who are in some position of disadvantage by reason of their own strangeness or awkwardness or because they have been the recipients of favors; to forget self without remembering too vividly one's self-forgetfulness; to fight and serve and suffer as life demands, and do it with a smile, and never once descend

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

to that subtle self-advertisement which says by its manner, See how I suffer and yet with what cheerfulness!—these are among the graces which both beautify and reveal character.

That has been to many an enigmatical word of Jesus, when he said, "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." There is another "daughter of the voice of God" less stern than duty. The margin of spiritual profit lies beyond the field of commands, beyond the point of even moral obligation, in the area of graces freely and finely exercised.



CHAPTER X

The Dance of Life

IS LIFE a dance or a struggle? Is it a fight or a frolic? Is its object joy; and if so, must it be a noble joy or will any joy do if only it is sufficiently intense or sufficiently durable? Or is its object victory; and if so, over what and for what? Here are radically opposed views of the meaning of life. It would appear that the affirmation of one is the negation of the other, and that, while both might conceivably be wrong, both could not possibly be right.

But life is full of apparent contradictions. Some of them yield readily to analysis, or quickly merge their conflicting claims in some more inclusive interest as one pushes ahead with the concrete business of living. With others, the hope of reconciliation is a hope long deferred, making the heart of the philosopher sick and the heart

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

of the controversialist hard and bitter as the conviction deepens that he cannot be right unless every one who cherishes a different set of values is wrong. Some of these antinomies perhaps will persistently resist solution by any common process, because they deal with incommensurable quantities. No one has yet produced a simple formula covering all the facts of free will and causation, any more than any one has exactly expressed the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter. The most one can do in the latter case, and perhaps also in the former, is to arrive at an approximation which will work under field conditions within less than an assigned margin of error.

Within the fields of morals and religion, in the evaluation of conduct, and in the large interpretation of the meaning of things, these pairs of opposites and the tension between them are very puzzling, but they go far toward making life interesting. Nothing can be interesting long if it is too simple. Einstein's conception of

THE DANCE OF LIFE

warped space lends a new fascination to the concept of space, even for those who do not know just what he means by it, and gives a new interest to what was about the least interesting thing imaginable, mere emptiness. Emptiness seems less empty and vacuity less vacant if it can be twisted.

Is life a struggle, or is it a dance? Puritanism and monasticism, mutually opposed in most other respects, agree in viewing life as essentially a struggle. Every earnest person can corroborate this view from his own experience, and there is eminent testimony to its correctness. The apostle Paul represents it as a fierce fight for the mastery, and again as a hotly contested race, which adds to the idea of struggle the thought that the contest must be fought out under strict rules and subject to the judgment of an umpire who will disqualify a contestant for a foul. He counsels the girding of the loins, the putting aside of every hindrance, the stripping off of every superfluity. He recommends suitable weapons and armor. He

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

fixes his eyes upon an unfading wreath of victory. He gives no countenance to that sauntering mood of the soul which would stroll through pleasant places and delight itself in present joys. Battles are not fought for the sake of the fighting, whatever may be the joy of strenuous struggle, but for the rewards of conquest. Races are not run for the fun of running, but for the prize that only the winner gains. Danger and wounds, pumping heart and straining muscles, are not good in themselves, but are the price of a more ultimate good. The moral life of man cannot be stated adequately in any terms which fail to take account of this element of struggle and the sacrifice of present desires for the attainment of a larger and a later good.

But if life is only a conflict, what can be the meaning and the value of it? Is the prize of victory then something outside of life? The dualism implicit in the conception of a temporal life of bitter struggle to be rewarded by an eternity of indolent indulgence is unthinkable.

THE DANCE OF LIFE

It robs eternal life of those moral values which it has been at so much pains to establish for the life that now is, and leaves the winner morally bankrupt at the very moment when he has gained the goal of his desires. Or if the struggle of the individual is wholly altruistic, the price paid for blessings which others are to receive, then by the terms of the definition these others must in their turn toil to transmit benefits to still more remote "others." If we are here only to serve others, what are the others here for? Somewhere in the process there must be some attainable value in which each struggling individual has his proper share and participation.

Two opposing views of religion—perhaps both capable of being included in some larger synthesis, but presenting for the moment an apparently irreducible antithesis—are the humanistic and the "crisis" views. The Christian humanist sees civilization with its arts and refinements, its resources and enrichments, as an aspect of the spiritual pilgrimage of man. Everything which

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

tends to beautify life with a diversity of cultural interests and which furnishes the resources by which these interests may be stimulated and satisfied, is in the truest sense an integral part of religion. Just because religion has no separate area of its own, is not one of the aspects of life coördinate with the esthetic, the ethical, and the economic, but operates in the same fields in which they operate and utilizes the same materials which they utilize, there is no conflict between the ideals of religion and the normal and legitimate processes of human life. If one will live appreciatively, one will be far on the road toward living religiously.

The "crisis" theologians, on the other hand, make articulate the consciousness which we all experience from time to time that what the world needs and what we individually need is not to be gradually improved in certain uncouth details of our behavior, or to get a little more light on this or that obscure matter, but to be radically made over. "Ye must be born again." In our

THE DANCE OF LIFE

economic and political life, in our social and esthetic experience—and for that matter very largely in the institutional life of religion itself—we are going in the wrong direction. What we need is not more speed but to stop and turn around. The literature of religion is full of the records of religious experiences which testify that something of the sort happened in individual cases. As one looks at the international situation, the labor-capital situation, the baleful effects of greed and avarice and the overvaluation of things, it is easy to believe that the function of religion is not one of amelioration or of good-natured coöperation with the general process of civilization, but is one of irrepressible and uncompromising conflict.

I doubt whether any full statement about either religion or life can be made without giving ungrudging recognition to both of these aspects whether or not one is able to formulate a logical reconciliation of them. Christianity must challenge the world, the flesh, and the devil; it must

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

even challenge respectability, orthodoxy, financial security, and every form of institutionalized conservatism. This means that Christianity, when it is vital, is constantly precipitating a crisis between its own ideals and things as they are. And in harmony with that view, the life of the individual, if he is to have a place in the Christian program, must be primarily a struggle.

But this crisis is no new thing. The struggle has been going on for a long while and parallel with it go activities of a less strenuous and more placid sort. There are values and beauties even in the world that now is. The present order is not altogether bad. There are beauty and joy and love, and these are not only good in themselves, but if one enters into them with zest and appreciation, they are the source and spring of experiences which are actively good. The Christian man who understands both his world and his faith does not need to be either flabby or fierce. He will fight, but he will also dance.

A dance, unlike a race or a fight, is a form of

THE DANCE OF LIFE

activity which seeks the attainment of no end beyond itself. Its only aim is to increase joy by expressing the joy that already exists, to afford satisfaction and a sense of well-being by giving an outlet to inner impulses and powers. This is said with no more intention of encouraging the fox-trot and one-step than the apostle Paul had of encouraging his young converts to enter the prize ring or the stadium. Life needs its element of spontaneous and joyful activity. There is a danger of moral overstrain, and this danger is the more serious because the best people are the most subject to it.

Let us remind the frivolous how much they need to gird up their loins and fight like gladiators against the common enemies of our humanity. And let us also remind the earnest contenders for all good causes how much life needs the illumination of beauty, the enrichment of art, the refinement of grace, the stimulus of rhythm, and the leaven of laughter. Life is a struggle, and life is also a dance.



CHAPTER XI

Religion and Health

PEOPLE were never so much interested in their physical health as they are today. It is necessary that they should be. Health is a by-product of the simple and natural life; but the development of civilization, both material and cultural, has placed humanity under an increased and constantly increasing strain. It is as true of the human mechanism as of any other that vibration and wear and tear increase with speed, more than proportionately, perhaps with the square, or even with the cube.

We are saved, to be sure, from some of the cruder stresses to which our ancestors were subjected. We suffer less from cold and from muscular weariness than our pioneering forefathers, and some diseases have been conquered and eliminated: yellow fever and the plague completely,

RELIGION AND HEALTH

smallpox and malaria largely, typhoid to a great extent. But we suffer increasingly from more complex ailments. Naturally. We see more sights, hear more sounds, think more thoughts (such as they are), and have more reactions and adjustments to make and less time in which to make them. Besides, in a complex civilization we have more things to worry about. With the growing multiplicity of our desires and our dependence upon the functioning of social machinery which, for the most part, we can neither understand nor control, we have more anxiety lest we should not get the things that we want, or even the things we need. It is an arguable proposition that civilization will—if not destroy itself by the nervous instability which it engenders and by the physical, mental, and moral overstrain incident to the effort to keep up with it—at least reach a limit beyond which it cannot go on account of its nerve-racking effects. This is not a necessary result, but there are enough phenomena pointing that way to indicate an in-

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

creased need for health and for giving conscious consideration to its maintenance. Some phrase it by saying that we need a gospel of health.

The response to this demand for more adequate means of maintaining health takes various forms. The most significant, perhaps, are the marvelous developments of scientific medicine, both curative and preventive. There is the widespread enthusiasm for more hygienic living, for exercise, play, and vacations. And there is a perfect epidemic of propaganda for a thousand types of mental healing, ranging from the cults of general cheerfulness to those of miraculous faith-cure, some based upon a foundation of scientific data, others inspired by religious enthusiasm and supported by texts and testimonies, not a few apparently motivated solely by the desire for profit.

Three lines of influence converge to make the subject of health germane to religion. First, there is the tradition of healing as a part of the work of Jesus and of the church; second, there is the discovery that man is a unit, not a combina-

RELIGION AND HEALTH

tion of two independent and discordant entities, body and soul, with the resulting corollary that religion must minister to the whole man and to the wholeness of man; and third, there is the discovery that there are psychical factors in the preservation and restoration of physical health, and the beginning of the development of some methods of utilizing them. If personality disorders—which are certainly a matter to which religion cannot be indifferent—are often the basic facts in relation to a diseased condition of the physical organs or to abnormalities in their functioning, then to this extent the question of health lies within the field of religion.

Throughout the whole history of Christianity there has been a steadfast belief in healing by miracles. Whatever one may think about the historicity of the healing miracles of Jesus, there is no doubt as to the historicity of the very early and universal belief in them. They included the healing of the blind and of various types of mental affliction and nervous disorder, commonly

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

described in the unscientific terminology of that day as demoniacal possession: the violently insane, like the Gadarene; the epileptic, like the demoniac boy whom the disciples were unsuccessfully trying to cure at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration; and cases involving local paralysis, like the man with the withered hand and the man with the dumb spirit. Some of the cases of leprosy were perhaps nervous, for there is such a type of leprosy and in no case is there any mention of the restoration of destroyed tissues. Most—not all—of the recorded miracles had to do with functional rather than organic disorders.

Whether or not Jesus knew the nature of these diseases, he used the then current diagnosis and the popular terminology in describing them, and he employed methods which in principle are approved by modern students and practitioners of psychotherapy—such as the use of physical acts, like the laying on of hands and anointing with clay, to focus the attention and help the

imagination of the patient, and the appeal to hope and confidence. Even his apparent acceptance of the current theory that the phenomena of insanity were caused by malignant demons was psychologically sound though it may have been medically erroneous if considered as a serious diagnosis. The last thing the mental healer wants to do is to get into an argument with his patient when everything depends upon inspiring confidence in order to cure by suggestion. Moreover, the power of the personality of Jesus, which no reader of the gospels can doubt, like that of a radiant and optimistic physician, put a tremendous force behind the suggestion which he conveyed to the sufferers. These powers which he used are still available—I do not say to the same degree. It will be understood that I am not undertaking to explain the miracles but merely to indicate the extent to which the procedure employed in them was in harmony with the principles and methods of modern psychotherapy.

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

The same documents which record the healing ministry of Jesus record also the expectation that his followers would have the same power, and give instructions for prayer and anointing with oil as means for curing the sick. The medieval church built up an elaborate tradition of miraculous healing, especially by supplication to the saints and by the therapeutic virtues of their bones. The continuity of miracles is an integral part of the Catholic faith. As preliminary to the canonization of a candidate for sainthood, it is required that there shall be three properly authenticated miracles wrought by his relics, and most of these are cures of the sick. This tradition continues unbroken to the present day. The faithful Catholic lives in an atmosphere in which a miracle can be expected to occur at any time of great need—sometimes even to meet rather trivial emergencies, like the winning of a lawsuit or the finding of a lost bicycle. The cult of the saints furnishes the paraphernalia by which these miracles, whether of healing or otherwise,

RELIGION AND HEALTH

are wrought. There were more saints canonized during the nineteenth century than in any preceding century. The greatest wonder-working shrine in Europe, at Lourdes, had its origin in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Modern miracle-healing cults, outside of the Catholic church, are numerous—Dowie, Christian Science (I am aware that they do not call it miracle, but it comes to the same thing), A. B. Simpson, the Emmanuel Movement, the healing services of Dr. John Roach Straton, Brother Isaiah, and scores of others less widely known. These differ from each other in details, but all embody the principle of expecting bodily relief as the direct gift of God in answer to prayer.

It may be queried, parenthetically, whether this extraordinary recrudescence of credulity in a so-called age of science may not be, in part at least, a by-product of that very scientific development with which it seems so curiously inharmonious. Science has far outrun popular understanding. The ingenuity of a relatively few

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

discoverers and inventors has produced a multiplicity of devices which anyone can use but which few understand. We drive automobiles about which most of us know nothing except how to start, guide, and stop them. We use electric lights and telephones whose operations we cannot explain. We "get" New York or Denver on the radio by simply twirling the knobs, without having the faintest idea of the processes by which this marvel is accomplished. There was never a generation which used so many devices which it did not understand. We are a generation of button-pressers and knob-twirlers; the scientists do the rest. We are so constantly getting results which have no obvious causal relation to the simple means which we employ in getting them, that our sense of causality is weakened. We are habituated to mysteries. Miracle has been domesticated. The impossible has happened so often, in fact, happens so regularly at our beck and call, that nothing any longer seems incredible. Thus there

RELIGION AND HEALTH

springs up a new susceptibility to superstition because there are so many unscientific people in this scientific age. A miracle in a new field—say in the cure of disease without physical means—makes no appreciable additional strain upon credulity.

Considering how widespread the belief in miraculous healing has been and still is, the question arises whether there is not also a nonmiraculous type of religious healing. There is the more encouragement to look for an affirmative answer to this question because scientific inquiry has discovered such a large nonmiraculous element in all these supposedly miraculous cures. Not only the miracles of Jesus, but the post-Biblical records of miraculous healing have the same element of powerful suggestion. At Lourdes, Einsiedeln, Sainte Anne de Beaupré, Guadalupe, Zion City, wherever the faith-healer operates with any show of success, the stage is set for cure by suggestion. Nothing is lacking except individual diagnosis and psychoanalysis.

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

Health is not a merely physical quality. It involves the tone and wholesomeness of the whole personality. One occasionally meets a "splendid human animal," physically robust but mentally and perhaps morally deficient; but even in such a case one is impressed more by the animality than by the splendor. This is not health. Health is the harmonious working together of all the elements that go to make a person.

Some physical ills have a moral significance. Such are those which follow upon the sins of intemperance in all forms. Hate and harshness, greed and cruelty, make their mark on a man. Both the wasting and the crabbed attitude toward life bring physical results. A man cannot habitually hate without showing it in his face. But are the facial muscles the only ones affected? Or are the facial nerves the only ones stimulated or anesthetized by emotion? Probably the whole body, inside and out, has expression as truly as the face, if we could only read it. That is to say, it undergoes subtle modifications corresponding

RELIGION AND HEALTH

to the stream of emotional states and tensions, and some of these physical changes affect the functioning of vital organs and so affect health. The choleric man is a bad insurance risk. Fiction tells truth when it speaks of Rip Van Winkle's wife who "burst a blood vessel in a fit of rage at a peddler." A specialist in digestive disorders says that ninety per cent of his cases are nervous, and his consulting psychologist tells of curing a very aggravated case of chronic indigestion by making up a quarrel between the patient and her sister over an inheritance. Her hatred had made her sick. Her bitterness had dried up the gastric juice as well as the milk of human kindness.

The problem is not so simple that one can say that all sickness is the result of sin, either "this man's or another's." "Sin" is too narrow and too prejudicial a category to cover all of the personality disorders that may produce disturbances of health. And, besides, it does not follow from the fact that some sickness is due to mental causes that all sickness is. Job's friends were

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

wrong in their easy generalization that all suffering is the punishment for sin; "the words of Bilead the Shuhite were not pleasing unto Jehovah." But *some* suffering is the direct result of wrong mental attitudes and character conditions, and diseases *sometimes* have moral implications and mental and moral remedies. When the heart is set right, the circulation improves and the glands do their work and the nerves lose their abnormal tension. At least sometimes.

A considerable body of indisputable evidence of actual cures can be adduced by nearly every cult or organization that has acquired much reputation along this line. There are also many failures which are not advertised. We see the crutches left behind at the shrines, but not those on which disappointed cripples hobble away. There are no testimony meetings of the uncured. An enthusiastic defender of Lourdes admits that in one year only eighteen out of eight thousand patients (described as non-nervous cases) were certified as cured. It ought to be said to the

credit of the administration of Lourdes that no promise of a cure is given to any one. You simply come and take your chances, with the frank understanding that the chances are against you. For reasons of her own, Our Lady selects only a few to be the recipients of her healing favor. It is like a lottery, in which the prizes are high but few, and those who do not get them do not feel desperately disappointed because they had no special reason to expect that they would draw the lucky number.

Undoubtedly some of the curing cults send out false statements for purposes of propaganda, and it is equally sure that there is much illusion in regard to cases claiming to be cured. A follow-up study of one hundred cases of claimed faith-cures by various systems showed that within two years two-thirds of the patients had died of the diseases of which they were said to have been healed. But with allowance for all these facts, there is a residuum of real cures, and

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

probably there is a vast amount of general toning up of half-sick people.

Nothing can be proved about the reality of religious healing by *a priori* argument from the power and goodness of God. It is not a question of what God can do, or ought to do, or must do, but of what God actually does do. Certainly He does not remove all kinds of physical defects. I have never heard it claimed that God had ever miraculously produced a new leg, or even a new finger, in place of one that had been cut off. Neither does he remove hunger or sustain life without food, though this has been claimed for limited periods. Nor can anything be proved by arguing from the unreality of evil or of matter to the possibility of curing diseases by a wave of the hand or by a formula denying sickness and affirming health. If matter is unreal, then health is no more real than sickness. Bodily defects can no more be removed by calling them metaphysically nonexistent than a stone can be lifted by arguing that most of it is only

RELIGION AND HEALTH

empty space in the interstices between the flying electrons which compose its atoms. We are not interested in metaphysical entities, but in phenomena and experiences. And the experience of being sick or of having a broken leg is a real experience.

But there are latent healing forces in the body which cure when the case is reasonably curable, if they are not hindered. Faith, hope, confidence, cheerfulness, good-will toward one's fellows, remove some hindrances to healing. The sum and consummation of all these confident and cheerful attitudes is faith in God. If religion is good for anything, it ought to have some efficacy in giving a man a sense of harmony with the universe, and especially with that part of it which constitutes his immediate personal environment; in lifting him out of his pettiness and querulousness, his fears and tremors; and in enabling him to face the world, in no holiday mood of careless ease and indiscriminate optimism, to be sure, but with some confidence in

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

the beneficence of the world-order and some measure of adjustment to it. There are latent healing forces in the universe. It is not all a bitter struggle for survival. There are wounds of conflict, to be sure, but wounds heal. Flowers spring up after the forest fire. Old sorrows grow dim and new joys cover them up like waving grain on a battlefield. The sum of these beneficent forces in things physical and mental is God. The more fully we are at one with these forces, with God, the more we tend to become mentally, morally, and even physically sound.

Whether or not it is the business of the church to undertake a healing ministry on a scale commensurate with the need of it, is a question upon which I am not disposed to dogmatize. Admitting that human life is not divided into sacred and secular, and is not rigidly departmentalized, and that religion has its roots in experience of many kinds and bears its fruit in activities which traverse the whole range of life, still it does not follow that the church should enter every field

RELIGION AND HEALTH

with an organized program of its own. The business of healing, granted that it has its moral and religious aspects, involves also the employment of expert medical and psychological service. Whether, in any particular situation, a truly religious service to a given community involves, among other things, the establishment of a clinic for mental healing, will doubtless depend upon local conditions, just as the determination as to whether the best foreign missionary work in a given area will be medical, educational, evangelistic, or a combination of all three, will depend upon the specific needs of the time and place.

It is important to remember that the physical means of healing are as much from God as the mental means. "Shall we trust the camels to Allah to-night?" asked the servant of Mohammed. "Yes," replied the prophet, "but tie them first." Allah's care for camels operates best through a picket rope. We pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," and we plant and reap

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

and bask that our prayer may be answered. We pray, "Thy Kingdom come," and work and plan that it may. "Who healeth all thy diseases," says the psalmist; partly by these mental means which we are only beginning to learn something about, and which are assisted by trust in Him, and partly by medical science.

If you are sick, then, it is an act of faith as well as of good sense to use all available means of recovery. First, repent of your sins, not in fear of death but in hope of life. Get right with your brother. Do not think too much about yourself. Get in tune with the infinite. Believe in God. Make your mind healthy, cheerful, hopeful, and trustful. Second, call the best available doctor and do what he tells you. And, third, remember, both as an aid to cheerfulness and as a truth about life, that, even if you are not cured and if you live on the rest of your days ill or crippled, there are some beautiful possibilities of character and service and joy in triumph over a persistent thorn in the flesh.



CHAPTER XII

The Attainment and Use of Liberty

THE most popular word in the English language is "liberty"—unless it is "million." The bright lexicon of our common thought may have dropped "sin" and "salvation," or relegated them to the obscurity of fine print at the bottom of the page as obsolete terms no longer in common use or good repute. But the one indispensable word in the idiom of modern life is "liberty." It is as necessary in the vocabulary of fundamentalism as in that of modernism, though with a somewhat different connotation and range of meaning.

It is more than a word. It is a banner, a torch, an oriflamme, a trumpet-call, a title-deed to the riches of human personality and the attainable satisfactions of life. Martyrs have bled and burned for it. Patriots have fought

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

and died for it. And there have been no better investments of energy and life than those which have been made for the sacred cause of liberty.

But it is also a bit of conjuring apparatus. It is the silk hat from which religious prestidigitators and political demagogues draw forth the white rabbits of their favorite fancies and pet schemes. It is the stage-money with which rogues pay fools for deeds that cost them all that is best in them. It is the *ignis fatuus* which visionaries follow through the marshes of their doctrinaire projects, miring deeper at every step. And it is the wind upon the sea, filling the sails for voyages to all ports, without which their barks were as well moored to the rotting wharfs. It is all things to all men—and it saves some.

When a proposal is made to me in the name of liberty, I am affected somewhat as I am when a proposition is presented with the assurance that it will make money. I am interested but not convinced without further evidence. Some so-called money-making projects are not good for

THE ATTAINMENT AND USE OF LIBERTY
the investor; and some are not good for anybody else. The slogan is all right, but the particular enterprise needs looking into. Some enterprises proposed in the name of liberty are not good. But liberty is—always.

No one dares wholly to deny the right of men to liberty; not even the pope, or Mussolini, or the most rigid type of theologians, who come perhaps as near to it as any. Even they only put barriers to liberty in particular directions, with the claim that this enlarges men's liberty in other directions. None dares to rise in protest when other men sing the praises of liberty in general. To do so would be to forfeit the favor of any audience. The farthest one can go is to draw certain deadlines which liberty must not cross; or to establish areas in which it shall not operate, as there may be a zone of martial law in time of war where ordinary civil rights are suspended; or to admit all that is said in honor of liberty and to add a warning "*but.*"

You can gauge the curve of a man's thought

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

by the place he gives to liberty and the use he makes of "but." "But" is one of the most revealing words in the language. I once attended an international peace congress of youth movements in France. When enthusiastic youth seemed venturing too far on the perilous paths of liberty and peace and good-will, some elder statesman was always at hand to arise with eloquence upon his tongue to add his encomiums upon "la liberté" and "la paix,"—"mais, *amis*—"

Does one say: Men must have liberty, of course, within reasonable limits, *but*, after all, laws and standards are universal, divine, unchangeable, and man's highest function is to trust and obey? Then you have his philosophy of life as clearly expressed as though he had written a book, and perhaps more so—a philosophy of patterns to be copied, lessons to be learned, rules to be observed, a copy-book morality. Or does one say: Man must, of course, respect his neighbor's rights and revere the wisdom

THE ATTAINMENT AND USE OF LIBERTY
of the ages, *but*, after all, man is essentially a free creature and can come to moral maturity only as he wins liberty and exercises it wisely? Then you have a very different philosophy of life—one which makes the moral life a matter of exploration, research, discovery in new fields, with all the perils and all the possibilities of a high adventure.

Liberty is dangerous; but it is the safest thing there is. It has its perils, but they are less than the dangers of denying or abridging it. It is as when a traveler, lost in the desert, considers whether he shall go in search of a water hole. To go is dangerous; not to go is fatal. To grant or claim liberty in the supreme concerns of life is a risk; to deny it is sure death. And this applies equally to religious thinking and to the moral life. There is nothing casual or flippant or irresponsible about such an adventure. It is the most serious thing in the world.

The church is historically committed to liberty—the defense of an area of conduct and be-

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

lief not subject to control by the state. After all due allowance has been made for ecclesiastical ambition, tyranny, and arrogance, of which there has been plenty, this is the meaning of the old struggle between church and state. The church has often set up a government of its own to defeat this very principle and to encroach upon the rights of individual personality; and when not a government, then an organized force of sectarian bigotry with effective means of social control. A friend, who passed his boyhood in a community in South Dakota populated by an immigrant sect with a rigid code of conduct, tells how his father was excommunicated and placed under the ban because he allowed a young man to call upon his daughter, when all courting was taboo and marriages were supposed to be arranged by the elders of the church. The ban forbade any member of the church—which included the whole neighborhood—to visit him, speak to him, buy from him, or sell to him. A papal excommunication in the Middle Ages

THE ATTAINMENT AND USE OF LIBERTY
backed by the ban of the empire could not have been a more effective check upon liberty. But excommunications with their accompanying social bans illustrate the perversions of the function of the church. Far more general and typical has been the insistence of the church upon the freedom of the inner life from external compulsion.

Wherever there is personality there is, in theory at least, sovereignty within a limited area. The actual attainment of it has come through the operation of a twofold process. On one side, it is historical and social; on the other, it is a personal process which must be worked out anew for every separate individual. The historical struggle for liberty has only won for the individual a standing ground upon which to make his own personal struggle. For the individual to-day, the winning of liberty is chiefly a fight against enemies that are within. Intellectual indolence limits liberty, for it is of little advantage to a man that no external organization

denies his right to think freely if he cannot command the mental energy to do so. Moral cowardice limits the exercise of liberty, for, while the opinions of our fellows often reënforce our feeble purposes, they equally often erect a barrier which we have not the courage to break even when we could and should. Tradition and habits bind us, for in making decisions and forming opinions on matters deeply affecting life it is not easy to transcend the restraints imposed by our own former opinions and courses of action. Most seriously of all, perhaps, the choices of our better nature are continually in danger of bondage to impulses and urges of a sort that are usually called "lower." The theological term for them is "sin." It describes a very real foe to moral liberty. The apostle Paul describes this inner struggle very vividly: "The evil which I would not, that I do . . . Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Liberty is more a duty inseparable from moral maturity than a privilege. "Trust and obey" is

THE ATTAINMENT AND USE OF LIBERTY only half of a program. The creative spirit of man cannot make its contribution to the on-going of the world in that way. Personality does not develop when docility is the sole or the main principle. A too docile child is little trouble, but gives little promise. The artist, the inventor, the explorer, must do something more than trust and obey, and the rounded character has in it something of all these qualities. Jesus said, "Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends."

The solution of the problem of authority in religion lies in the realization that the concept of authority is foreign to religion. An extreme statement, of course, and perhaps not literally true. But what it means is that religion has to do with appreciation, persuasion, love, and the exercise of free choice, and that in proportion as these are operative the category of authority ceases to be relevant. It is so in any group in which there is mutual understanding and mutual affection.

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

The best symbol of the spiritual community which includes both God and man is not a civil state, least of all a monarchical state, enforcing its laws by authority backed by force, but a co-operating group of friends or, better still, a family whose several members have proper attitudes toward each other. The more perfect such a group is, the less any member of it thinks about authority. The concept of authority doubtless has its minor utilities, like the traffic regulations in a city, to keep the members of the community from getting too much in each other's way or to restrain them from doing themselves irreparable injury before they learn better, but its educational and cultural value is much less than is commonly supposed. As a father myself, I am not seriously concerned about the alleged disintegration of parental authority in our times. I am not interested in exercising authority over my children. I never exercised much, or wanted to. The children are grown now to a very satisfactory maturity,

THE ATTAINMENT AND USE OF LIBERTY
and I exercise none at all. But even when they
were small, I preferred to exercise influence
rather than authority. Not what a child is made
to do, but what he is taught to like, counts in
the development of his character.

Most parental discipline of the sterner and
more authoritative sort, I am firmly persuaded,
has for its primary purpose not to develop the
children into genuine persons, exercising liberty
with power and wisdom, but to keep them from
disturbing the peace or interrupting the occupa-
tions of the older members of the family. So
long as God is thought of as doing everything
"for his own glory," it is doubtless quite natural
to think of Him as using those methods of coer-
cion which are used by parents who order every-
thing for their own comfort.

But it is pretty clear, I think, that God's inter-
est in man is not chiefly in having him get
through the routines of life in an orderly way
and with a minimum of annoyance to the higher
powers, but in educating him into His own

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

image and likeness, in teaching him to love the things that are lovely and to value the things that are valuable. And that is a much more difficult process, even for God, than merely giving and enforcing laws. Men learn those lessons only by the exercise of liberty. I hold, also, to a conception of God which implies that He wants men to love Him, and even God cannot compel love. When love is desired, the category of authority is quite irrelevant and inapplicable. The quality of love, like that of mercy, is not strained.

Conformity to the demands of external authority has no moral or spiritual value; which means that it has no human value. I am not saying that it may not have utility in getting through a specific emergency. It produces ecclesiastical and social respectability; not character. The authority of Christ is primarily that of a teacher. Its validity depends upon what it is worth; and that is enough to give it all the certification that it needs. Never did a teacher

THE ATTAINMENT AND USE OF LIBERTY
give wider scope to the judgment and free choice
of his pupils. Never did a religious leader lay
down so few laws or leave his followers in such
a free exercise of liberty.

Freedom, it should be noted, means freedom to
do something; not just freedom to be free. Too
often the free spirit exhausts itself in bold dec-
larations of independence, mere pronunciamen-
tos of liberty. If a man claims the right to think
for himself, then let him *think*, not merely fol-
low his prejudices and impulses. If he claims
the right to give laws to his own personality,
then let him give them, not live lawlessly. It is
a principle of international law that "a blockade
to be respected must be effective." It is equally
true that a declaration of moral and intellectual
independence must be effective if it is to be re-
spected, and it cannot be effective unless it is
backed by good-will, good faith, and intelli-
gence. Liberty is a revealer, as well as a devel-
oper, of character. What we do when we do
as we please reveals what we are. What we think

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

when we do our own thinking reveals our quality as intelligent beings.

Liberty produces that rich diversity which makes life interesting. Therefore, formal and conventional persons, who recognize only one type of excellence, hate and fear it. Only by appreciating qualities which we do not have, cultures other than our own, can we have a peaceful and friendly world with mutual tolerance and respect, and without ironing out all differences to a dead level of uniformity. The carvers on the old cathedrals showed a high degree of individuality. Each did very much as he pleased. Some did badly, but the total result is more rich and varied than if they had been mere stone-cutters following designs that had been made by one mind.

What, then, is a liberal faith? The assumption sometimes is that it means not believing very much, that it implies the whittling down of conviction to an irreducible minimum. This is contrary alike to the common sense use of words

THE ATTAINMENT AND USE OF LIBERTY
and to the deepest meanings of experience. To have a truly liberal faith means rather to believe in a large and liberal way, without undue haggling over minutiae, without overnice scrutiny of the collateral upon which one lends one's allegiance. As to the mere acceptance of propositions in a creed, one cannot too meticulously scrutinize the evidence or too cautiously criticize the presuppositions of a proposed theory. But that is not faith; that is science. Much that is proposed as an object of faith is rather an object of investigation, and calls for research or analysis rather than for credulity. But faith has to do with ultimate values which lie beyond the reach of demonstration and with enterprises which call for the spirit of divine adventure. The liberal believer will not be niggardly in his belief in the spiritual values of life or hesitant in his commitment of himself to their realization.

If texts of Scripture can scarcely be quoted as authorities, in the more rigid sense, for the principles of Christian liberty, they may at

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

least be cited as giving to them the support of expert testimony. I will summarize the most important of those principles with Scriptural illustrations:

Liberty is the gift of God through Christ.

If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. John 8:36.

Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. II Cor. 3:17.

Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Rom. 8:21.

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free. Gal. 5:1.

Knowledge of the truth gives liberty.

Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. John 8: 32.

A free man is not free from the obligation to use his freedom for the common good.

THE ATTAINMENT AND USE OF LIBERTY

For though I be free from all men, yet have
I made myself servant unto all. I Cor.
9:19

Ye have been called unto liberty, only use
not liberty for an occasion to the flesh.
Gal 5:13

So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be
judged by the law of liberty. James 2:12
As free, and not using your liberty for a
cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants
of God. I Peter 2:16

If meat make my brother to offend, I will
eat no flesh. I Cor. 8:13

*But a free man is not bound to observe all the
petty scruples of other people.*

Why is my liberty judged of another man's
conscience? I Cor. 10:29

*Liberty looks to action, is not theoretical but
practical.*

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.
James 1:25

The will of God is not a hindrance but a means to liberty.

And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts. Ps. 119:45.



CHAPTER XIII

The Necessity of Art

UNDER the title, Affirmative Religion, I have been trying to affirm the fundamental necessity of *faith*, conceived as a recognition of the reality of the spiritual values of life, in distinction from the triviality of most of the attractive but superfluous things that we weary and fret ourselves about and spend ourselves upon, and the importance of a brave and adventurous quest of the things that are real and the commitment of ourselves to intelligent programs for the realization of our ideals. I have been asserting that *sin* is the great and fatal hindrance to the achievement of the best in human life, and that the only way out of it is by *repentance*, which is a practical readjustment of life to a point of view which may be most adequately defined as the will of God, and that the

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

Scriptures and the *church* are among the most useful helps to that end. I have been affirming the possibility of *salvation* through the progressive realization of the ideals of Jesus Christ in the attainment of a life so rich in the fulfillment of our best desires that we can want it to continue.

These are all words of high dignity in the history of religious thought and in the vocabularies of the professional promoters of religion. It may be that, to some, bringing the word *art* into such sober company will seem like whistling in church. But I affirm the necessity of art with no less confidence than the necessity of faith and repentance. For such an enrichment and fulfillment of life as I have attempted to suggest, there is need not only of such truth as can be stated in propositions and defended by argument, or such knowledge as can be gained by experience and confirmed by experiment, and not only of such standards of conduct as can be embodied in ethical principles and precepts, but also of a

THE NECESSITY OF ART

factor which can best be called art—which is an affirmation of the highest realities in imaginative rather than literal terms and a sensuous representation of supersensuous values.

The things that are best worth saying can never be said in direct and categorical terms. Hence the need of poetry, which is not mere saying and does not carry its full meaning when paraphrased into prose. Hence the need of music, which cannot be translated at all; and of architecture, as distinguished from mere building to keep out the weather; and of painting and sculpture; and of the arts of courtesy and worship.

Art is not a weak estheticism, to be viewed suspiciously or patronizingly by earnest souls; it is not the making of pretty but superfluous things; it is not a mere surface decoration of life, but is structural and integral with its highest interests.

It is commonly accepted that truth, goodness, and beauty are the three great categories of

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

value, and that science, morality, and art deal respectively with these three fields. Religion is neither a fourth coördinate with these, nor is it alien or hostile to any of them. We are familiar with the attempt to assert an alienation between science and religion, and with the disastrous results which ensue whenever this is in any measure achieved. While religion seeks ethical ends, there is sometimes apparent conflict between ethics and religion, for some forms of religion undervalue individual morality and some ignore social ethics. But a separation of religion from either individual or social morality is fatal both to religion and to life. Art has sometimes been in closest intimacy with religion, and has sometimes been viewed with suspicion and contempt by it. All of these alienations are sins against the unity and the fullness of life, and so against religion. For religion must accept truth from whatever source it comes, must inculcate virtue in all relations, and must utilize art both in the expres-

THE NECESSITY OF ART

sion of reality and in the development of a technique of rich and beautiful living.

Art is necessary for spiritual health, primarily, because truth is necessary; and great truths can be grasped and expressed and utilized only in imaginative form. It is only the little and mechanical truths that can be really stated in cold, hard, propositional form; mere facts, such as that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides, or that the attraction of gravitation varies directly with the product of the masses and inversely with the square of the distance; and historical facts, as mere events apart from their significance. But the goodness of God, the joy of life, the bitterness of grief, the power and glory of love—these are things that cannot be expressed by formulæ or by the simple joining of subject and predicate with the addition of proper modifying phrases and clauses. Man cannot live by logic alone, or by those truths which can be caged in propositions.

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

It is the primary business of art, not to give pleasure, but to express the highest spiritual reality. If some literal-minded persons asks exactly what spiritual reality is expressed by some particular work of art—some picture, or poem, or song, for example—there is no answer which will satisfy him in the terms in which he desires it; for if the work of art has any justification at all, it is that it gives expression to something which cannot be otherwise expressed. The dogmas of the creed are efforts to make supersensuous realities in some measure intelligible by sensuous images; in other words, they are works of art. Trinity, three persons in one God, Son of God, fatherhood of God, Light of Light—what are these but symbols and figures by which to convey some sense of truths that cannot be embodied in literal definitions? The creeds are sometimes spoken of as scientific statements of the faith. They are not works of science, but works of art, good or bad, adequate or inadequate, as the case may be. They are—to use

THE NECESSITY OF ART

another and more appropriate word which has scholarly authority—"symbols" of the faith.

The control of conduct in the interest of a sane and satisfactory life requires art, for art affords an escape from the banal and the commonplace. Says A. Clutton Brock: "We are always lamenting and repenting of our wickedness; but even in that we flatter ourselves. Our real sin is not wickedness, but something less dignified and exciting for which I know no word but the half-French one, banality. Banality is a word for sameness where it ought not to be, that is, in the things of the mind."

The life of instinct, on the animal level, is common and undifferentiated within the species. Animals of a given species may by instinct do wonderful things for their own preservation or for the perpetuation of their race, but they all do the same things. When human activity exhausts itself in nutrition and reproduction, we have the banalities of greed, lust, and hate. These old sins are all the same, stale, stupid, commonplace, and

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

imitative. Man achieves personality by differentiation in the pursuit of higher interests, and art is the sincere individual expression by which man arises to complete personality. The saint is an artist in personality. I refer not to such saints as are canonized because their bones work miracles, but to those canonized by the common consent of mankind because their personalities work the moral miracle of inspiring, cleansing, and transforming men. These do not achieve sainthood by rule, but by a unique and creative art, the medium of which is conduct and ideals. These are the most interesting and valuable and plastic materials in which a work of art can be created. Art rests the will and exercises the imagination, and in the long run imagination dominates conduct.

But there is a factor in life beyond conduct. The dictum that life is three-fourths conduct is three-fourths wrong. Life is three-fourths impulses, emotions, appreciations, which are inexpressible in propositions and only partially ex-

THE NECESSITY OF ART

pressible in conduct. Life is joy and buoyancy, light and shade, love and hope. Art touches the springs of life, but it affords a release from the too-urgent practicalities, from the minor but insistent utilities the neglect of which may bring inconvenience, but complete absorption in which inevitably brings destruction. Art gives a rich and varied joy, and joy is a resource which adds as much to a man's social value as to his personal satisfaction. "A man's power to inspire and help his fellows depends in the end upon the wealth and variety of his capacities for enjoying himself. If he is himself indifferent to the manifold delights of living, he will presently come to restrict his services to his fellows to the limited gamut of his own powers of appreciation."

Art sets a pattern of contentment and perfection. Schopenhauer, a pessimist in most things, said: "Complete contentment, the truly acceptable state, never presents itself to us but in an image, in a work of art, in the poem, in music, from which one might fairly derive the

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

confidence that they somewhere exist in sooth.” So the artist becomes the prophet of a yet unrealized perfection. He affirms, in non-dogmatic and non-argumentative fashion, the values which he represents imaginatively.

The truth discovered, the vision seen, the ideal manifested and approved, call for response. This response may take the form of imitation in conduct—a response indispensable where it is applicable at all, but in itself inadequate. It may take the form of imaginative representation, in figurative art, for the best and highest elude any expression other than imaginative. Such representation gives a high form of pleasure, which is itself a positive good, and tends to the conservation and transmission of spiritual energy; for to re-live or pre-live the experience with a heightened emotion is to approach the heart of reality and to draw power from the ultimate sources of power.

Or the response may take the form of applause—an inadequate word for an emotional expres-

THE NECESSITY OF ART

sion of approval. We clap our hands, wave our handkerchiefs, bestow medals, confer honors upon those to whose worthy action we wish to give recognition. There is an urgent inner need for the creation of a pageantry in which to embody the expression of approval and appreciation of the highest things. Worship is such an expression of approval in the field of the highest possible interests. Its materials are words, music, symbols, sacraments, ritual, architecture, and the effective use of these constitutes the art of worship. It is as essential to the health of the soul as food is to the health of the body.

Any possible denial of the statement that worship, especially public worship, is an art, reveals both an inadequate understanding of worship and a low view of art. This truth, however, is not so much in danger of being denied as of being neglected. It requires no argument to prove that preaching is an art. One does not expect a minister without preparation to pour forth profuse strains of unpremeditated eloquence, nor

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

even, if he is wise enough to avoid conscious eloquence, to make a simple and straightforward and effective presentation of religious truth without considering the means by which he is to produce the effect which he desires. But it is too often assumed that acceptable and edifying public worship just happens. The liturgical churches have a certain body of tradition in the matter of worship which, often even in the absence of a conscious or tenable theory, saves them from formlessness and barrenness, though it may expose them to other dangers. For the nonliturgical churches there is no escape from failure in the art of worship except through a definite and determined study of its meaning, materials, and methods.

Public worship involves the expression of ideas and emotional attitudes in such a way that these ideas will be effectively communicated and these emotions will be stimulated in those who are in need of such communication and stimulus. Like every art, too, it must not only

THE NECESSITY OF ART

produce an emotional experience, but transmit energy. A legitimate part of the Protestant heritage is a righteous revolt against excessive dependence upon the paraphernalia of worship. We are distrustful—and on the whole wisely so, perhaps—of any program of worship which is too intimately bound up with particular items of equipment, acts, or forms of words, and which cannot go forward in the absence of specific ceremonial objects. But we have a heritage still older than this: our common and universal dependence upon physical and sensible means to furnish the medium and vehicle for our emotional attitudes and our moral enthusiasms. Fichte was not wholly wrong in saying that the world of space and objects derives its significance and its very reality from the fact that it is the stage and setting for the moral life of man and, so far as our experience extends, the necessary stage and setting. If men come to think that God cannot be acceptably worshiped without altars of a specified pattern, vestments of a partic-

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

ular cut, and certain authorized forms of words, doubtless the thing they most need to learn is that God does not need these. But worship is not a question of what God needs, but of what men need. Men need the uplift, the outlook, the cleansing, and the strengthening that come through worship, and they must have a technique of worship if they would practice the art effectively.

The principal instruments and means of worship include liturgy, music, and architecture. In all three of these fields the church is often the victim of the negligence or incapacity of its servants; of ministers who dully and imitatively follow a routine of "opening exercises" without considering what impression, if any, they are designed to produce or what value they may have other than providing a comfortable margin of time by which the sermon may be protected from interruption by late-comers; of musicians who may be technically good, but who are artistically bad because they are not sincerely trying

THE NECESSITY OF ART

to express what they are professing to express, that is, a religious emotion; and of architects who know nothing about worship and, therefore, either build mere auditoriums of which the only merits are that they keep out the weather and afford a place where an audience may hear and see whatever is said and done in them, or else unintelligently assemble an assortment of classic ecclesiastical lines and symbols in the simple faith that, if the resulting structure does not look like a fire-engine house or a public library, it must be a good church. Improvement in any of these matters is to be achieved only by a definite consideration of the effects desired and the means by which those effects can be attained. Such a deliberate choice of ideal objectives and selection of effective means is art.

The great basic fact about human life—and that means about religion, too—is the value of personality. Faith is confidence in personalities, one's own and others' and the personality that is at the heart of the universe. Sin is an in-

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

dignity done to personality. Salvation is the triumphant emergence of personality, permanent and victorious over the forces that threaten to destroy it. The worth of personality cannot be adequately affirmed by talking about it, but only by making life interesting and beautiful and enriching it with all the content and color that are available.

God as artist has been working through the ages with the media of things and sounds and colors, filling the world with a beauty which is biologically superfluous but spiritually necessary, bodying forth His thought in forms and hues and materials, most of all working with this highly plastic yet strangely resistant human material, as we do with our children, to make a product which shall have an eternal worth of its own and shall be an expression of the spiritual realities which lie at the heart of the universe. Man has no higher privilege than that of being, like Him, an artist both appreciative and creative.



CHAPTER XIV

Do We Need a New Religion?

DO WE need a new religion? The question was put point-blank in a recent magazine article and answered boldly in the affirmative. We do, said this writer, because the most urgent needs of this age are social needs, and Christianity is not in itself a social religion. It is a religion of individual salvation, addressing itself to the question which was uppermost in the minds of the thinking people in the first century of our era—What must I do to be saved?—but not to the question which has become serious in our age and will become increasingly serious with every successive age until it is solved—What must we do to save society?

This is one argument for holding that, if we need religion at all, we need a new one: the claim that Christianity has no solution for the

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

social problems which press upon us. A second possible ground for thinking that we need a new religion is the belief that Christianity is inextricably entangled with a world-view which the advance of scientific knowledge has rendered it impossible for intelligent men to hold. Let us see what there is in these arguments.

It is quite obviously true that the present state of society in that portion of the world where Christianity has been known and ostensibly practiced for all these centuries is so unsatisfactory that it cannot be contemplated without feelings of shame as well as apprehension. The reproach is quite generally brought against the church that it has not produced a Christian society, and for the most part the church meekly accepts the reproach, though perhaps venturing to suggest, by way of mitigation of its guilt, that, however bad the state of society may be in so-called Christian lands, it is rather worse elsewhere.

But why should the failure of mankind to pro-

DO WE NEED A NEW RELIGION?

duce a better civilization than the one which we now somewhat dubiously enjoy be laid at the door of the church? Is it perfectly sure that it was the business of the Christian religion to produce, by itself, a social order adjusted to stand the strain and meet the requirements of a world in which the economic processes of production, transportation, and exchange have been so thoroughly revolutionized? Did Jesus himself expect it, and did he make provision for it and give instructions which, if faithfully and intelligently carried out, would produce it?

To these last questions, the author of the article to which reference was made answers, "No." "You cannot make a Christian society by the simple process of adding good Christians together. Good social intentions do not inevitably operate to produce good social arrangements." Jesus was not much interested in the remaking of society by the slow and gradual processes of development, though he did leave with his disciples some expectation of a sweep-

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

ing reconstruction of the badly decayed social order through catastrophic means accompanied by his own return. As Christianity continued, generation after generation, to proclaim this hope of a regenerated society, but with no program for its achievement except to wait for the coming of an apocalyptic kingdom which seemed ever more and more remote and improbable, it fell back upon the task of saving individuals and helping them to get as comfortably and creditably as possible through a world whose present arrangements were confessedly bad and were not getting noticeably better. The hope deferred transferred itself to another world, and the church virtually abandoned the task of improving this world. Now, after nearly two millennia, the expectation of a sudden and miraculous rescue of our society and its transformation into a heavenly kingdom has entirely faded, except in a few minds, and the church finds itself rather ashamed of things as they are but powerless to do anything about it.

DO WE NEED A NEW RELIGION?

The writer whom I have quoted thinks that this failure is not to be laid to the account of the church, because Jesus never offered his teaching as the complete and final word, because Christianity simply does not contain the materials out of which to make the plans and specifications for a satisfactory society, and therefore the world needs another genuine revelation.

This argument has cogency until one arrives at its conclusion, and there it breaks down, for it hinges upon a mistaken idea of the way in which religion is related to the problems of life. It implies that codes of personal conduct and programs of social action are given by revelation, and that therefore, if the old revelation did not give us satisfactory codes, we should look for a new one which will. To say that Christianity is a religion of individual salvation, but not of the salvation of the social order, involves an assumption that within the first of these fields it gives us detailed guidance, while in the second it gives us nothing. In reality, it gives us broad

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

principles for both individual and social morality, but details and rules and programs for neither. These latter must be the product of experience and intelligent research. It is vain to assume the role of a watcher upon the walls awaiting the deliverance of a new revelation embodied in another Christ—a character so sublime, so obviously above the common levels of humanity, that his advent may be taken to mark the beginning of a new religion—to do for us what, as a matter of fact, revelation does not do.

It is true that Jesus did not give, nor have his followers with unanimity agreed upon, a specific technique by which the general principle and attitude of good-will, or good social intentions, can pass over with complete success into good social arrangements. It is equally true that the formulæ for individual salvation, in the terms in which they are given by Jesus and those who were nearest to him, do not translate themselves automatically into the idiom of actual life in specific concrete situations. Problems of in-

DO WE NEED A NEW RELIGION?

dividual morality cannot ordinarily be settled by reference to chapter and verse, any more than problems of social reconstruction.

There are so few problems of strictly individual morality that it is not easy to find suitable illustrations, but perhaps temperance comes as near being individual as anything. The question whether a man ought or ought not to drink alcoholic beverages cannot well be settled by resorting to revelation, even if one holds very strict ideas of the inerrancy of the "revealed" word. Solomon's advice was good (if you can call that revelation) but his practice probably did not adorn his doctrine, and the New Testament passages most frequently cited are very unsatisfactory from the standpoint of textual prohibition. Over against "Be not drunk with wine" stand the miracle at Cana and Paul's regrettable advice to Timothy. No one seems ever to have discovered by exegesis that Christianity taught total abstinence until, in comparatively recent years, alcohol was found, in actual practice, to

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

be more dangerous than had previously supposed. There are some great principles set forth by Jesus as to the value of human personality, some teachings about self-control, and some strong suggestions touching the relation of the body to personality. But the question of the effects of alcohol on the human system is a question for science, not for revelation—except as science is revelation. When distilled liquors were introduced, and alcohol became far more injurious than before, the world did not need a new revelation; it needed chemists and physiologists. Religion furnished a principle and a motive. Science must furnish specific information and methods.

Similarly, the problem of the reconstruction of society into a form more consistent with our highest appreciation of man and our most Christian attitudes, does not demand a new revelation or a new religion. It does require that the religion that we have—which is quite adequate, so far as religion can be adequate, if we will

DO WE NEED A NEW RELIGION?

take it seriously—shall be supplemented by a scientific technique of social organization. This does not require revelation; it requires intelligence. The religion of Jesus will furnish principles, motives, and an emphasis on human values. It must be the business of economists, political scientists, and sociologists to find the methods by which these principles can be embodied and these values conserved.

If these do not do their work well, or if they do not at once come to agreement, or if members of the church following the lead of different thinkers cannot agree upon one program of social reform, the blame does not rest upon the Christian religion. The need is not for a new religion to take the problem off our hands and tell us exactly what to do, but for a continual revival of the spirit of good-will, which was the spirit of Jesus, plus a continuing effort through intelligent research and experimentation to develop an improved technique of social living.

What about the other argument—that we

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

need a new religion because Christianity is hopelessly committed to a world-view that is no longer tenable? As a matter of fact, the argument is usually put the other way around—that the newer world-view must be wrong because it is radically different from that which has been historically associated with Christianity and that therefore any religion which utilizes the thought-forms of this newer world-view is essentially a new religion. This is the argument that is stated as cogently as it can be by Professor Machen in his *Christianity and Liberalism*. But must we choose between the alternatives of keeping the old world-view in order to save the old religion or finding a new religion to match the new world-view?

It is true that religion, even when selfishly applied as a mere means of gaining such personal ends as health, prosperity, or perpetual felicity, has always a universal element which compels it to take its structure and fabric, its formulation and terminology, from some conception of the

DO WE NEED A NEW RELIGION?

general scheme of the universe. Two men who live in radically different kinds of worlds—one, for example, in a world of orderly sequence where effects can be predicted with some accuracy from known causes, and the other in a whimsical world in which anything is likely to happen at the fancy of the benevolent or malevolent spirits which dominate it; or one in a world known to be one of the least of the millions of bodies moving in an intricate but orderly maze to make up the solar and stellar system, and the other in a universe no part of which, including the depths of hell, the seven heavens and the throne of God, is supposed to be more than twelve hundred miles from Suez—two such men, I say, will have great difficulty in finding a common form of religious thought. I do not say that they cannot have a common religion; on the contrary, I am confident that they can, and ought. But if either one insists that a formulation based upon his world-view is identical with the essence of true religion, there

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

is going to be a good deal of lost faith among those members of the community who are surer of their world-view than they are of their religion, and a good deal of dangerous obscurantism among those who are strong on religion and weak on science.

Similarly, it is impossible to express devotion to one's country in any full and adequate way, to put any color and content into one's utterances of patriotism, without both having and using some definite impressions as to what kind of country it is. Its size, climate, scenery, topography, occupations, products, form of government, are all factors to be considered in writing a patriotic speech or a national song or a textbook of civic duties. A cozy little community like San Marino, a republic five miles square, and a world-girdling British Empire cannot express the national spirit in identical concepts and images. The same thing is true of religion and world-view.

In an excellent chapter on this topic in his

DO WE NEED A NEW RELIGION?

book, *The Understanding of Religion*, E. T. Brewster says:

All the men who made our historic creeds, most of those who wrote our best hymns, many who fixed the forms of our rituals, had a world-outlook altogether different from our own. Calvin and Luther, for example, both believed in a flat earth; and Calvin seems to have clung to that opinion even after Magellan's voyage. Luther called Copernicus "upstart astrologer" and "fool." Milton, in the eighth book of "Paradise Lost," though he knew Galileo personally, cannot bring himself to "And yet it moves." Wesley, born sixteen years after the "Principia," opines that "Mr. Newton's theories tend to infidelity." Even now, every short while, the Monday morning newspapers report some clergyman's animadversions on "Darwinism."

Ultimately, most of our formal theology

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

goes back to Augustine and A.D. 325. It took shape therefore in a dying world, where a great civilization was running down from good to bad and from bad to worse, until the night of the Dark Ages closed over Europe. Our creeds, therefore, our hymns, our church services, our entire religious vocabulary, reflect the world-view of men who, so far from being able to discover new truth, could not so much as hold on to the old which the past had given them, and who were bringing back to plague mankind every sort of superstition which Greek science had held at bay. Naturally then, some of their opinions do not altogether fit a time when, in certain fields, we make more progress in twenty years than our forebears made in twenty centuries.

Six days in the week we live in an ordered world. On the seventh, we open the church door on a land of topsy-turvy, where axes float, dry sticks change to serpents, angels

DO WE NEED A NEW RELIGION?

stir the waters of wells, bedeviled swine run violently into the sea. We say prayers for rain an hour after we have consulted a government bulletin to see whether we shall need an umbrella before we get home.

We can write good war poetry without mentioning shields and spears. We can talk about books and architecture and music and the rest of the things of the spirit in an accurate, critical, modern vocabulary. But we do not seem to be able to sing hymns or to say prayers or to define dogmas without dragging in the world-view of people who looked to a king's touch to cure skin-disease and rang a church-bell to frighten off a comet. The inevitable result is the "seeming unreality of the spiritual life."

Naturally, the spiritual life must seem unreal if every presentation of it is entangled with a world-view known to be unreal. We need not be greatly agitated in regard to our hymns, for

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

hymns are poetry—or are supposed to be—and poetry can always use the concepts of an earlier world as the symbols of emotions which are contemporary but are also timeless and enduring, and no one is deceived thereby into thinking that the concepts themselves are of permanent validity. There is need for new hymns expressive of newer appreciations of truth and duty, but the old ones are still good. We can use "Jerusalem the golden," in spite of its antique pageantry. Likewise, "The Lord is my Shepherd" is a part of the permanent riches of even that part of the race which has had no personal experience with sheep; and no new cosmology can rob us of "Our Father, who art in heaven." The art side of religion has unlimited capacity to assimilate and utilize the accumulated concepts and symbols of past generations, enriched as they are by associations and mellowed with age.

But when we pass from the region of poetry to that of prose and undertake to voice our be-

DO WE NEED A NEW RELIGION?

liefs or state our duties, we must speak in a modern tongue. We must project our statements upon the background of a world-view that is really ours. We must sternly avoid all hallowed (but hollow) phrases which would, perhaps, sing well, but which either mean nothing to us or else do not mean what they very obviously and categorically say.

The argument is not that one must, as a Christian, state his faith in the terms of the world-view which is now commonly called modern. It is that he should feel free to state it in the terms of the world-view which he actually holds, and that he should feel free to hold the world-view which the known facts of science seem best to warrant. Luther and Calvin believed in a flat earth; modern Lutherans and Calvinists believe in a round one. But the changed world-view did not require them to change their religion. If a man today actually believes that the world is flat, he has a right to phrase his religion in the corresponding terms. God bless him! But if he

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

thinks that the belief in the flatness of the earth is an integral part of his religion, God help him! In that case his religion needs fixing even more than his cosmology.

In the progress of scientific thought, there will be mistakes, of course. Evolution may conceivably be one of them, though I think not. Probably many of our present ideas will be antiquated in a hundred years. But the sum of the matter is that, since the enlarging world-view cannot be cramped back into conformity with the statements and implications of the old creeds, and since there is no religious reason why it should be, we must make new statements of the old faith which it shall be possible for men to think in the modern world. A faith which cannot thus be restated from time to time as the progress of knowledge demands, is a faith that has in it the seeds of mortality. And a faith whose advocates persistently identify it with outworn and untenable formulations which are consistent only with a world-view that has been

DO WE NEED A NEW RELIGION?

universally abandoned by intelligent people, is a faith betrayed in the house of its friends.

We do not need a new religion. We do need continually more practical expressions of Christianity in a scientifically studied technique of social living and fresh formulations of it in terms of a world-view that is intelligently tenable.



CHAPTER XV

The Mystical Mind

EVERY man is part rationalist and part mystic. The proportions differ in different individuals, but both elements are always present. Perhaps each tends to approach zero as a limit in persons of an extreme type of temperament, whether mystical or rationalistic, but certainly in all but the most abnormal cases both are there in some recognizable degree.

The rationalistic part of us asserts itself in the demand for reasons and evidences, whether in matters of religion or in the regular course of ordinary business and in the formation of opinions with reference to practical affairs. We take some pride in believing only upon evidence and, when absolute proof is impossible, in keeping the degree of our assurance fairly proportional to the preponderance of the evidence. It

THE MYSTICAL MIND

is a moral duty not to believe frivolously. Applying this attitude to religion, we want some measure of consistency between the intellectual life which we lead as citizens, men of affairs, students, or business men, and the things which are presented to us in the name of religion. We cannot hold on Sunday that which is denied and confuted by everything we think and do on Monday.

But even on Monday we are not wholly rationalists. There is an entire range of acts and interests which cannot wait on proof, and a range of values which can never be completely rationalized. If I want to go to Europe, I buy a ticket from a man I never saw before, on a boat which perhaps I never heard of, run by men whom I do not know and of whose competency I know nothing except that it has been approved by other men whom I do not know. The course will be charted by methods that I do not understand to a port which I have never seen. Not only must I trust these men if I am ever to get

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

across, but I trust them gladly and naturally and lie down in my berth at night with a feeling of security as nearly perfect as one needs to have. Or if I start a business on a busy corner, I must do it with no demonstrable certainty that any one will ever again pass that way, or that, if people do continue to pass, any of them will come into my store. I cannot sell to people in general but only to actual individuals, and yet I do not know any particular individual who will become a customer. I must either take the risk of people coming and some of them buying, or else I must stay out of business.

There is this factor of adventure upon the unknown in all life. We cannot expect anything else if we undertake to make a life out of the materials supplied by honesty, kindliness, faith. No one can demonstrate to us that it will succeed. In this, as in the other enterprises, we must lend ourselves without collateral and trust life without guarantees. Those who insist that religion should be based on demonstrations and

THE MYSTICAL MIND

infallibilities should consider that nothing else in life has a basis of that sort.

Both of these elements are germane to religion. With reference to questions of history or science, whatever use religion makes of them, the critical attitude is indispensable. History and science rests upon ascertainable data. To assert as historic fact what cannot be established by historical evidence is mere legend-weaving. An explanation of the phenomena of nature can be tested by no criterion but scientific evidence critically examined. To assert without evidence in these fields is not faith, but folly. A good deal of the material which is taught as historical religion is of this sort. It does not call for credulity, but for examination.

But religion also has a factor which lies outside of the realm of proof. In that field is the mystical element. We need not be afraid of the word. Mysticism has led to some strange fanaticisms and fantastic excesses in the past. It is not likely to do so now. Our danger lies

rather on the other side. We are immunized to dangers of mysticism by the scientific and rationalistic spirit.

Mysticism has claimed to do some things which it can never do, such as giving direct and immediate knowledge of God. It does not give knowledge at all, if that term is used in any careful sense. The heart of man persistently turns to the desire for immediate communion with God. A critical philosophy assures him that what he conceives as an immediate knowledge of God is only an immediate knowledge of his own experience which he interprets by reference to a supposed objective reality. The criticism of mysticism as an instrument of knowledge is, to my mind, quite valid. But still the sense of direct contact with reality persists, just as confidence in direct contact with an external world persists in spite of all theories of knowledge which threaten to reduce it to mere subjectivity; and with it remains the mystical assurance of some

THE MYSTICAL MIND

deep significance in the total scheme of things and of man's intimate relation to it.

The poets are perhaps better interpreters of this than the philosophers, for they move in an atmosphere of appreciation and are unembarrassed by questions about proof and demonstration. Let us seek among the American poets for some typical expressions of those emotional responses to life and the world which, in their higher reaches, becomes specifically religious. This will give us, without any arguments or futile efforts to demonstrate the undemonstrable, a picture of the actual content of the mystical consciousness in the case of some of the most sensitive and at the same time least fanatical spirits.

The simplest and perhaps the basic factor is a sense of joy in the ecstasy of life:

Now, trumpeter! for thy close,
Vouchsafe a higher strain than any yet,

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

Sing to my soul, renew its languishing faith and
hope,

Rouse up my slow belief, give me some vision of
the future,

Give me for once its prophecy and joy.

O glad, exulting, culminating song!

A vigor more than earth's is in thy notes.

Marches of victory—man disenthralled—the
conqueror at last,

Hymns to the universal God from universal man
—all joy!

A reborn race appears—a perfect world, all joy!

• • • • •

Joy! joy! in freedom, worship, love! Joy in the
ecstasy of life!

Enough to merely be! enough to breathe!

Joy! joy! all over joy!

—WALT WHITMAN, *The Mystic Trumpeter*

Of a world so vibrant with life, one asks not guaranties of happiness or success. If joy is here,

THE MYSTICAL MIND

high achievement must be just beyond and well
worth the adventure:

Away, O soul! Hoist instantly the anchor!
Cut the hawsers—haul out—shake out every
sail!

Have we not stood here like trees in the ground
long enough?

.

Sail forth—steer for the deep waters only,
Reckless, O soul, exploring, I with thee and thou
with me,

For we are bound where mariner has not yet
dared to go,

And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.

O my brave soul!

O farther, farther sail!

O daring joy, but safe! Are they not all the seas
of God?

O farther, farther, farther sail.

—WALT WHITMAN, *Passage to India*

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

The mystic's faith is not an assurance of his own ability to wring the object of his heart's desire from a reluctant and unfriendly world, but confidence that the very structure of the universe is such that a happy issue will ensue if he will be patient and refrain from overmuch meddling:

Serene, I fold my hands and wait,
Nor care for wind, or tide, or sea;
I rave no more 'gainst Time or Fate,
For lo! my own shall come to me.

I stay my haste, I make delays,
For what avails this eager pace?
I stand amid the eternal ways,
And what is mine shall know my face.

Asleep, awake, by night or day,
The friends I seek are seeking me;
No wind can drive my bark astray,
Nor change the tide of destiny.

.

THE MYSTICAL MIND

The stars come nightly to the sky;
The tidal wave comes to the sea;
Nor time, nor space, nor deep, nor high,
Can keep my own away from me.

—JOHN BURROUGHS, *Waiting*

This is not merely the cheerful optimism of those who have never known tears. It is sometimes voiced with the greatest conviction by those who most explicitly acknowledge the poignancy of earth's tragedies. It is not that our disappointments are not poignant, but that they are not permanent:

When I consider Life and its few years—
A wisp of fog betwixt us and the sun;
A call to battle, and the battle done
Ere the last echo dies within our ears;
A rose choked in the grass; an hour of fears;
The guests that past a darkening shore do beat;
The burst of music down an unlistening street—
I wonder at the idleness of tears.

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

Ye old, old dead, and ye of yesternight,
Chieftains, and bards, and keepers of the sheep,
By every cup of sorrow that you had,
Loose me from tears, and make me see aright
How each hath back what once he stayed to
weep;

Homer his sight, David his little lad!

—LIZETTE WOODWORTH REESE, *Tears*

The sense of one's personal weakness and inadequacy is reinforced by a consciousness of a protecting power which transforms situations of imminent peril into places of security and contentment.

Thy sea, O God, so great,

My boat so small,

It cannot be that any happy fate

Will me befall

Save as thy goodness opens paths for me

Through the consuming vastness of the sea.

Thy winds, O God, so strong,

So slight my sail.

THE MYSTICAL MIND

How could I curb and bit them on the long
And salty trail,
Unless thy love were mightier than the wrath
Of all the tempests that beset my path.

Thy world, O God, so fierce,
And I so frail.

Yet, though its arrows threaten oft to pierce
My fragile mail,
Cities of refuge rise where dangers cease,
Sweet silences abound, and all is peace.

—WINFRED ERNEST GARRISON

Whether the voice of Nature is the voice of God, or the voice of God the voice of Nature, is largely a question of emphasis and approach. But the symbolism and the terminology of things divine must be called into play to tell how intimately the mystical consciousness feels God to be moving both in the operations of nature and in the dark, slow processes of human history:

Out from the heart of nature rolled
The burdens of the Bible old;

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

The litanies of nations came,
Like the volcano's tongue of flame,
Up from the burning core below,—
The canticles of love and woe.
The hand that rounded Peter's dome,
And groined the aisles of Christian Rome,
Wrought in a sad sincerity;
Himself from God he could not free;
He builded better than he knew;
The conscious stone to beauty grew.

.

The word unto the prophet spoken
Was writ on tables yet unbroken;
The word by seers and sibyls told,
In groves of oak, or fanes of gold,
Still floats upon the morning wind,
Still whispers to the willing mind.
One accent of the Holy Ghost
The heedless world hath never lost.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON, *The Problem*

Mystics more evangelical than Emerson find

THE MYSTICAL MIND

in specific aspects of nature—in morning and evening, and in the recurrence of dawn after dark—the suggestion for prayers and meditations:

Still, still with Thee, when purple morning
breaketh,

When the bird waketh and the shadows flee;
Fairer than morning, lovelier than the daylight,
Dawns the sweet consciousness, I am with
Thee!

Alone with Thee, amid the mystic shadows,
The solemn hush of nature newly born;
Alone with Thee, in breathless adoration,
In the calm dew and freshness of the morn.

.

When sinks the soul, subdued by toil to slumber,
Its closing eye looks up to Thee in prayer;
Sweet the repose beneath Thy wings o'ershading,
ing,

But sweeter still to wake and find Thee there.

So shall it be at last, in that bright morning

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

When the soul waketh and life's shadows flee;
O, in that hour fairer than daylight dawning,
Shall rise the glorious thought, I am with
Thee.

—HARRIET BEECHER STOWE,
Still, Still with Thee

But not only does beauty build a ladder up to God. If the immanence of God in nature is to be something other than a pretty sentiment, its uglier aspects must also be taken into account:

It is not only in the rose,
It is not only in the bird,
Not only where the rainbow glows,
Nor in the song of woman heard,
But in the darkest, meanest things
There alway, alway, something sings.

'Tis not in the high stars alone,
Nor in the cups of budding flowers,
Nor in the redbreast's mellow tone,
Nor in the bow that smiles in showers,

THE MYSTICAL MIND

But in the mud and scum of things

There alway, alway, something sings.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON, *A Fragment*

This sense of the friendliness and vibrant life of nature, of something singing even in the mud and scum of things, of something working for good even in those situations which appear to be compounded of unmitigated ill, many of the mystics personalize and call God. What they are doing is not constructing proofs of the existence of God, or even asserting an immediate experience of Him, but so interpreting the world and their experience with it that the assumption of a beneficent personality expressing himself through it seems as inevitable as the assumption that the physical features and audible voice of your friend are the manifestations of a friendly intelligence and not merely a meaningless pattern of color and a disturbance of the air. Sometimes the features of nature are frankly taken as a mere analogy, as in these lines from a poem that

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

should be quoted entire if its length did not forbid:

Ye marshes, how candid and simple and nothing-
withholding and free

Ye publish yourselves to the sky and offer your-
selves to the sea!

Tolerant plains, that suffer the sea and the rains
and the sun,

Ye spread and span like the catholic man who
hath mightily won

God out of knowledge and good out of infinite
pain.

And sight out of darkness and purity out of a
stain.

As the marsh-hen secretly builds on the watery
sod,

Behold I will build me a nest on the greatness
of God.

I will fly in the greatness of God as the marsh-
hen flies

THE MYSTICAL MIND

In the freedom that fills all the space 'twixt the
marsh and the skies.

By so many roots as the marsh-grass sends in the
sod

I will heartily lay me a-hold on the greatness of
God.

Oh, like to the greatness of God is the greatness
within

The range of the marshes, the liberal marshes
of Glynn.

—SIDNEY LANIER, *The Marshes of Glynn*

The pantheistic leaning of such mystical nature poetry is obvious, but occasionally a poet specifically guards against such a limitation of God to the phenomena of nature:

Though one with all that sense or soul can see,
Not prisoned in his own creations, he;
His life is more than stars or wind or angels—
The sun does not contain him nor the sea.

—RICHARD HOVEY, *Transcendence*

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

The more specifically Christian content of the mystical consciousness, the sense of assurance of divine guidance and care, finds expression in such verses as Bryant's familiar "Lines to a Waterfowl," and in many hymns. When not the safety of an individual is considered, but the victory of noble causes even at the cost of bitter failure for those who fight for them, the affirmation of ultimate triumph is of the very stuff of which religion is made, though the vocabulary of religion may not enter into the statement:

They went forth to battle, but they always fell.

Something they saw above the sullen shields.
Nobly they fought and bravely, but not well,
And sank heart-wounded by a subtle spell.

They knew not fear that to the foeman yields,

They were not weak, as one who vainly wields
A faltering weapon; yet the old tales tell
How on the hard-fought field they always fell.

It was a secret music that they heard,

THE MYSTICAL MIND

And that which pierced the heart was but a word,
Though the white breast was red-lipped where
the sword

Pressed a fierce cruel kiss and did not cease
Till its hot thirst was surfeited. Ah, these
By an unwarlike troubling doubt were stirred,
And died for hearing what no foeman heard.

They went forth to battle, but they always fell.

Their might was not the might of lifted spears.
Over the battle-clamor came a spell
Of troubling music, and they fought not well.

Their wreaths are willows and their tribute,
tears.

Their names are old sad stories in men's ears.
Yet they will scatter the red hordes of Hell,
Who went to battle forth and always fell.

—SHAEMAS O'SHEEL, *They Went Forth to Battle,
But They Always Fell*

There are denominations of Christians who
have laid emphasis upon the mystical assurance

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

of the presence and saving power of Christ. Not always have these tended to discount intelligence by substituting emotion for knowledge, though some, of course, have done so. Others, like the Quaker poet, have combined emotional warmth with a saving sanity:

Immortal Love, forever full,
Forever flowing free,
Forever shared, forever whole,
A never-ebbing sea!

.

We may not climb the heavenly steeps
To bring the Lord Christ down;
In vain we search the lowest deeps,
For him no depths can drown.

.

The letter fails, and systems fall,
And every symbol wanes;

THE MYSTICAL MIND

The Spirit over-brooding all,
Eternal Love remains.

.

In joy of inward peace, or sense
Of sorrow over sin,
He is his own best evidence,
His witness is within.

.

O Lord and Master of us all!
Whate'er our name or sign,
We own thy sway, we hear thy call,
We test our lives by thine.

—JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER, *Our Master*

The more positive and definite the affirmations of the mystics become, as in these lines of Whittier's, the more the critic of predominantly rationalistic temper finds himself asking, How does he know, and how can he prove it? Such a critic must be reminded again that the business

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

of mystics is not to prove things, but to feel and to interpret. If his interpretation seems good to you, you will doubtless make use of it without any urging from him. If he can lead you to feel as he feels, then you will gain from the emotion some such comfort or stimulus or enlargement of sympathy as he has gained and you will be glad of it. As to proving that the facts adequately justify the emotion, that is another matter. The mystic, *as mystic*, does not concern himself about proofs. But there is much enrichment of soul to be gained from things that cannot be proved.

Hear the words of a thinker who is both poet and philosopher, thus illustrating in his own person what I said in the beginning about the thinker and the mystic being present in some degree in every individual. In him both qualities are present in high degree. As philosopher, he would not advise us to trust a "surmise" when facts are available and logic is the appropriate instrument for handling them. But as poet and

THE MYSTICAL MIND

mystic, he knows that facts and logic do not carry us all the way in the pursuit of our highest interests:

O world, thou choosest not the better part!
It is not wisdom to be only wise,
And on the inward vision close the eyes,
But it is wisdom to believe the heart.
Columbus found a world, and had no chart,
Save one that faith deciphered in the skies;
To trust the soul's invincible surmise
Was all his science and his only art.

Our knowledge is a torch of smoky pine
That lights the pathway but one step ahead
Across a void of mystery and dread.
Bid, then, the tender light of faith to shine
By which alone the mortal heart is led
Unto the thinking of the thought divine.

—GEORGE SANTAYANA, *Sonnet*



CHAPTER XVI

The Life Everlasting

IT IS incontestable that the thought of the life hereafter holds a less prominent place in the thinking of the present generation than it formerly held. Yet it is only by conscious effort or deliberate evasion that one who attempts to sum up what he thinks about life can avoid giving some consideration to the end of life and what comes after. Prudent men cannot easily be indifferent to the future, even the far future, though they often affect to be. Thoreau on his death bed, when asked to give some expression of his assurance of a future life, replied: "One world at a time." It was a characteristic aphorism, but not a very wise one, for considering the future is no hindrance to sane and effective living in the present. In practical affairs we do not consider that it is so. We do not think that a boy neces-

THE LIFE EVERLASTING

sarily loses all the joy of his boyhood if he occasionally thinks about what he is going to be when he is a man. All education and most industry is anticipatory. Man is distinguished among animals for the degree to which his memories and expectations enter into the totality of the stimuli to which he reacts. In ordinary matters we do not think that it tends to impracticality and detachment from life to try to interpret present opportunities and experiences in the light of their probable issue.

It is only in the field of religion that we allow ourselves to be persuaded that thinking about life in the future must necessarily lead to neglect of the life that now is. We are told that the church must fit men to live on earth rather than in heaven—as though the two ideals were radically opposed; and that it must think more about better plumbing and ventilation in the tenement districts and less about mansions in the skies—as though these two aspects of the housing problem obstructed each other's solution. It is a mat-

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

ter of history that, among those who have wrought most faithfully to make the cities of earth decently habitable, a large proportion have been those who looked most confidently for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Let us at the outset, then, lay aside the prejudice that it is dangerous to think about the future for fear of losing sight of the present. We are in no such danger. It is true that there have been times when and places where, in earthly situations which seemed both intolerable and hopeless of betterment, men have turned for consolation to the thought of glories beyond the grave; and the promise of those post-mortem blessings may sometimes have operated to make them too complacent toward present evil conditions—especially when other people were the victims of them. But that is not a characteristic peril of our age. We can not claim any extra credit for practicality by professing indifference to the future.

THE LIFE EVERLASTING

In reality, this rather flippant turning away from this question is not so much motivated by a fear of neglecting the present world, or by a real lack of interest in a life hereafter, as by despair of gaining any certainty about it. Many who profess a most orthodox theory of the future life, believe it is only because they lack the courage to doubt it; and many who doubt it lack the courage squarely to face their doubt. The evidence is subtle and largely subjective. It does not lend itself to rigid demonstration. And perhaps we do not like to think about a life beyond death because we do not like to think about death.

It is true that there ought to be nothing very horrible about the thought of death. I looked at it once, as I had every reason to suppose, at what seemed to be the range of a few seconds, and it did not seem very terrifying. And when we have gone through it, if death is a dreamless sleep, we shall have had no more dreadful experience than we have every night when we go to

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

sleep, for in the nature of things we can never be conscious of the transition from consciousness to unconsciousness. Considered as the mere cessation of life, death is nothing to be afraid of. But we hate to think of missing what will go on after we have left the scene, as a child hates to go to bed when there is company at the house. The more we enjoy life, the more we naturally regret to think of leaving it. So, living ever in the presence of death—that first and most constant stimulus to philosophy—man has, almost from the start, desired and believed in a future life.

There have been some crude statements of the doctrine of immortality and some fallacious arguments for it which have tended to discredit it in the minds of thinking people, but they should do so only in the minds of those who are only half-thinking. There has been a grossly materialistic idea of the bodily resurrection. One remembers frescoes in old churches, showing skeletons rising half-clad, and bones flying through

THE LIFE EVERLASTING

the air to find their missing mates. There have been grotesquely literal interpretations of figurative descriptions of the future life—pearly gates, golden streets, golden harps, and an eternity of glittering and musical indolence in which, in the kindly words of St. Thomas Aquinas, “that the saints may enjoy their beatitude more richly, a perfect sight is granted them of the punishment of the damned.” There have been impossible localizations of heaven and hell, involving naïve conceptions of “up” and “down” which are meaningless with reference to our present cosmology. There have been crude and immoral theories of reward and punishment, which have sometimes quite obscured the legitimate and social motives of the moral life. The attempt to picture accurately the conditions and activities of a life beyond this life that we know, and the impossibility of making such a picture that is not absurd or drearily monotonous, or both, gives occasion to the sophisticated for denying interest in the whole subject.

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

Again, there have been arguments from imperfect analogy, sometimes with the apparent support of very high authority. Jesus said: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24). He was not speaking of the future life at all, but of sacrifice even to the death as the condition of the highest and most fruitful service. Paul takes the same figure (I. Cor. 15:36) and applies it—misapplies it, I should say—to explain the resurrection. But it does not explain the resurrection. The individual grain ceases to exist and new grains like it come into existence. The analogy illustrates the perpetuation of the race, generation after generation, not the preservation of the life of the individual. In a larger sense, it illustrates how the sacrifice of one can advance the general good. But it does not prove, it does not even illustrate, the continuity of personal existence.

The thing to remember, by way of clearing

THE LIFE EVERLASTING

the ground for constructive thinking, is that belief in the eternal conservation of the values of human personality does not stand or fall with these imperfect analogies or crude and childish pictures.

The universal, or almost universal, desire for a future life on the part of those who allow themselves to think about it at all, is often used as an argument to prove that there will be one. (I have an affirmative message, but I must still seem to be negative for a paragraph or two.) I think I would not deny all weight to this argument, but certainly its value is but slight. Desires are not always fulfilled; even universal desires. The desire for wealth is almost as universal as that for a future life, yet few get it. Such an argument invites the answer of the incorrigible Omar:

Heaven but the vision of fulfilled desire,
And Hell the shadow from a soul on fire,

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

Cast on the darkness into which ourselves,
So late emerged from, shall so soon expire.

Our visions of fulfilled desire are not always realized. It is conceivable that this all-but-universal desire for a life that shall outlast the flesh might have been developed to serve the ethico-biological purpose of stimulating virtuous acts and restraining men from vice; that it might be an instrument of social control, not a prophecy of reality. Such an important interest should not be made dependent upon the flimsy argument that people will always get what they want if they want it hard enough and if everybody wants it together. One has no right to say off-hand that such a desire represents an instinct implanted by God and that He must give eternal life to make good the promise which is implicit in the instinct. Still, the universal desire furnishes, if certainly not a proof, at least a presumption, a hypothesis worth considering. It would be a queer world in which mere bubbles of

THE LIFE EVERLASTING

consciousness should so extend the scope of their vision as to dream of ever being more than mere bubbles, but should still be bubbles—rising, swelling, glistening, vanishing.

The chief object of psychic research, as represented by the Society for Psychic Research, is to establish scientifically the fact of the continuance of conscious personality after death. In spite of many failures, such as the series of tests carried out under the auspices of an important scientific magazine, the body of data collected is not wholly negligible. Many scientific men are impressed, though few are convinced. Many observers believe that messages are received from somewhere by supersensible means, but whether from the dead, as claimed, or from the living is scarcely demonstrated. Some sober and unfanatical scholars profess themselves interested and open-minded, though unconvinced. But recourse to the rather devious and furtive methods of psychic research seems to imply an apparent confession of failure in the normal relations of

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

comradeship through the years, as though the dark room and the pencil in the slate and the gibbering voice of an Indian "control" could tell us more about our friends and the deep secrets of the values of human personality than we have been able to learn from them directly. The trivial character of the alleged messages does little credit to the intelligence of the spirits who are supposed to send them, but it has some advantage for purposes of verification. When the spirit of Professor James tells where he left his pink pajames, the information can be checked up as lofty talk about the glories of heaven could not. Still, it is discouraging to find that the spirits of the great departed so seldom have anything worth while to communicate.

If there is a legitimate field for investigation here, it is best to leave it to experts. Amateurs, nervous persons, the recently bereaved, and the emotionally unstable will do themselves more harm than good by recourse to the Cave of Endor. Nothing has been proved yet that will

THE LIFE EVERLASTING

convince most well-balanced minds. And even if everything had been proved that is claimed, the continuance of conscious personality for a few months or years would be no proof of any immortality that has significance for the life of man. It seems best, on the whole, that the separation between the earthly life and the next phase—if there is a next phase—should be sharp and clear, and that the evidence for the reality of the next phase should be something quite other than broken syllables of voices heard across the gulf.

It is worth observing that within the past generation there has been a change in the philosophical outlook in the direction of a world-view which is at least not wholly inconsistent with the idea of the continuance of personality after death. Materialism has definitely broken down. The rather too easy explanation that consciousness is merely the by-product of an interrupted physical reaction—an arc to bridge the gap in an incomplete sensory-motor circuit—seems less

convincing than it once did. The idea that thought is a product of molecular changes in the nerve and brain substance will not stand scrutiny. Efforts to explain mind in terms of matter appear to assume that matter is something quite simple and understandable—just obvious stuff, which one can see and handle, made up of indivisible and indestructible atoms. But now we have new theories of matter which make it quite as mysterious and hard to explain as mind. Possibly at bottom mind and matter are one—but which one? Certainly not matter, in the sense of inert stuff, for the physicists themselves do not admit the existence of any such stuff. Professor Thomson, in the *Outline of Science*, says: "By no juggling of words can we get mind out of matter and motion. And since we are in ourselves quite sure of our mind (in consciousness), we are probably quite safe in saying that in the beginning was mind. This is in accordance with Aristotle's saying that there is

THE LIFE EVERLASTING

nothing in the end which was not also present in kind in the beginning."

It is more reasonable to consider that the basis of reality is spiritual than that it is material. True, the phenomena of consciousness, as we know them, are always associated with a nervous system, but the nervous system does not explain the consciousness, and the attempt to explain either the mind or the universe in mechanistic terms has definitely failed. Consciousness without a nervous system would be no more mysterious than consciousness with a nervous system. No man can say, on the basis of present-day philosophy, that personal immortality is impossible or unthinkable. The continuance of the conscious personal existence of John Henry Jones after the dissolution of his body is no more improbable than the origination of that conscious personality was ten or a hundred million years ago when the earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the abyss.

As a matter of fact, much of the assurance

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

of the future life in the minds of Christian people goes back to their faith in the resurrection of Jesus. As an objective and physical event that any one might have seen who had happened to be there, the evidence is not all that could be desired. So far as the record goes, it was not witnessed except by those who were prepared by sympathy and devotion to see it. It is futile to argue about the method of the resurrection, and far worse than futile to brand as heretics those who cannot understand it as the revitalization of a corpse. The statement sometimes made that the resurrection, considered purely as a physical fact, is better attested than any other event in ancient history, is a gross exaggeration.

But if the physical fact lacks something of scientific evidence and the attestation of indifferent or hostile witnesses, it is better so. It is clear enough from any reading of the record that something happened that Easter morning that transformed the attitude of the men who were most closely in touch with it, and gave them

THE LIFE EVERLASTING

the abiding conviction that the Lord whom they had seen crucified was in truth alive. If we cannot tell exactly what happened—if even those who experienced the event could not tell—if no one can give a scientific account of it which will fit all the details of the record or will make all of the details of that record fit harmoniously together, perhaps it is all the better. It diminishes the temptation to dogmatize about it, and puts it in the category of appreciation rather than in that of the phenomena of natural science. But to those who have attempted to live in the power of that life, to reproduce that spirit, and to share in that fellowship with the Father, there has come a participation in the calm confidence that, in every essential meaning of the term, Christ is a living Lord. And the gist and substance of Christianity is the belief that such as he was and is all men may become. Because he lives, we shall live also.

The religion of Jesus presents a world-view, a set of valuations, objectives, and interpreta-

tions of the meaning of life. No man can prove by mathematical demonstration that it is correct. The most important things can never be proved. But people who try it find it satisfying. A conviction of the continued life of the spirit is an implication of that world-view and of that total system of thought and action. Neither that world-view nor that belief can be imposed upon us by authority, nor would they have the highest religious value if they could be. It is true that the mere desire for endless life does not prove that we shall have it, but the urge toward immortality is more than an instinctive wish. It is an implication of our highest moral ideals. If personality is the supreme value in the universe,—and we can neither prove nor doubt that—then we must either believe that, in some effective way, the essential values of personality will be conserved, or that the universe is constructed upon such senseless lines that its most valuable things are the least abiding. There is no use

THE LIFE EVERLASTING

in believing anything about a world so topsy-turvy as such a mad system would be.

In the last analysis, the chief proof of immortality is the character of God, and the belief that, however we may conceive and define Him, He is not so careless of human values as to create them only to destroy them just as they are beginning to understand and appreciate and achieve a little. If God is like Jesus—and that is his highest message—loving, considerate, mindful of his children, then we have ground for a lively hope that, in ways which we cannot fathom or image, our highest interests will be cared for. The affirmation of the fatherhood of God is in itself an affirmation of the value of human personality and a declaration of faith in its essential conservation.

A thousand irrelevant questions may be asked as to the nature of the life everlasting. We can know nothing about it. It is neither necessary nor possible that we should know. These are old questions. "How then are the dead raised,

and with what body?" But a God—or a world-order, call it what you will—which could produce personality in the first place from such unpromising materials, can preserve its values, or itself if its values are inseparable from itself—which we cannot know.

An ignorant man receives a check and commits it to a banker friend, saying, "Keep this for me." He does not know whether the banker will keep the identical piece of paper or not. If he is ignorant enough, probably he thinks he will. But he will not be alarmed if he trusts the better wisdom of the banker to keep the money which the paper represents. We can confidently commit ourselves and our friends to the keeping of a fatherly God Whom we believe to be trustworthy, like Jesus, through whom we have come to know Him best. He will surely preserve whatever of us is best worth keeping.

P. 72 - G. M. H. G.
S. M. H. G.
CHAPTER XVII

The Possible You

SOME years ago I saw the title of a book which was called *The Possible You*. I have forgotten, if I ever knew, the name of the author, and I never saw the book, but the phrase, "The Possible You," set all my bells to ringing. It is a book in itself in three words. It is more than a book; it is a gospel. The implication which it conveys, that there are unrealized possibilities in the most unpromising personality, is the very essence of good news. It is a guide post to the lost traveler; it does not exactly show him the road, but it assures him that there is one and that it may be found. It is not a specific medicine to the sick soul, but it is a hopeful promise that the sickness is not unto death—and that is often the best medicine.

I said it was good news—or a gospel, which

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

means the same thing—because the best news that can come to any man is that there is at least the possibility of better things ahead. Probably there are few persons so well satisfied with their present worldly estate that they would willingly believe that it would never be better. A vast amount of human wishing and working is devoted not to maintaining our economic *status quo*, however good it may be, but to trying to improve it—a better position, a higher office, a larger salary, a finer car, a more commodious house, and so on through the lengthening series of our illimitable wants.

What man wants is not to be rich, but to be richer; not to go fast, but to go faster. There are those who think that this desire for more and better equipment for living and this passion for acceleration are what makes the world go round; and certainly when we have proudly defined America as a land of opportunity we have had chiefly in mind opportunities for increasing affluence. This is not a thing to be despised. But

THE POSSIBLE YOU

with a casual recognition of the desirability of material enrichment, the advantage of living in a country where it is possible, and the danger of thinking too much about it, we can pass on to possible improvement in other respects.

Few as there are who are willing to say, I am satisfied with my present station and fortune, fewer still can say, I am satisfied with myself; and those who can say it are little to be envied. We admit our failures but commonly blame them upon circumstances beyond our control, because we seek excuses rather than remedies. But, "the fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings." And it is good news that we are not condemned by any power outside of ourselves to live on the low levels where we have our dwelling and within the narrow limits that hedge us in. If we live in a prison, the key is on our own side of the door. The actual man may be circumscribed by his own ignorance or his weakness of will.

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

He may be an underling to his own undisciplined impulses. But the possible man is a free man.

It is one of Chesterton's brilliant paradoxes that the good news of the gospel is original sin. What he means by it, I judge, is that the obvious phenomena of human depravity do not really represent man, but something that has been wished on him by his unregenerate ancestry and that may be removed by the use of those means of grace which have been provided. Theological thinkers throughout the ages, it seems, have devoted a good deal of their energy to proving that man, as he is, is not as God intended him to be—which seems obvious enough to require no proof—and that the thing which drags him down is not something that properly belongs to him, but a burden from which he can readily escape by taking advantage of the resources of which the church is the custodian. However that may be, there is a genuine evangel in the implication that our present moral and spiritual condition, whatever caused it, is susceptible of improvement; and

THE POSSIBLE YOU

in whatever form it comes, the assurance that man is not doomed to remain the poor thing that he is now is good news.

The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table remarked the existence of "three Johns"—John as he sees himself, John as his neighbors see him, and John as he is. These represent self-estimate, reputation, and character; or John's John, Henry's John, and God's John. All of them may be different. They usually are. But there is a fourth, the possible John. He is not—yet—but yet may be. Let us drop John and substitute you and me.

The phrase, The possible you, or, The possible I, comes with the directness of a pointed finger or an accusing eye. The actual, empirical I is a poor affair. How well I know its limitations and defects—its blundering efforts to do right and its headstrong efforts to do wrong, its sluggishness and timidity when there is need of decisive action, and its impatience in situations that demand restraint and consideration, its pu-

erile pursuit of lesser goods, and its repeated failure to follow even the dim light that it has. The apostle Paul's heart-searching cry, "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do," finds an answering echo in every soul that is honest with itself. The empirical you may be better than the empirical I; I hope it is; but it is not good enough to justify the good opinion you desire, especially your own, and the good fortune you hope to deserve.

The release from this bondage to the unsatisfactory present is in "the possible you"—for the pointed finger of accusation is also a beckoning finger. The accusing eye softens with sympathy and even brightens with hope. You and I are more than we have yet attained. That which is possible, though yet unaccomplished, has a kind of prophetic reality of its own. It is more interesting, more potent, more exhilarating than the poor, pitiable sum of all that has yet been reduced to concrete and recorded achievement. For "the soul that waits at heaven's gates"—like

THE POSSIBLE YOU

Kipling's Tomlinson—it may be right that it should face the stern demand, "Give answer, what ha' ye done?" There comes a time when only results count. But for men and women still in the making, still choosing and striving, stumbling and travailing in the sweet torment of life, no valuation is adequate which does not take into account what is yet possible as well as what has already been accomplished.

"What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" asked the psalmist. Job also was puzzled by the disproportion between God's attention and man's unimportance and futility. "What is man that thou shouldest magnify him?" Eliphaz echoed the inquiry, with a feeling that the question had no reasonable answer in view of the fact that man seemed to be little better than an obscene insect defiling the fair face of nature: "What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? Behold, he [God] putteth no trust in his saints.

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

. . . How much more abominable and filthy is man. . . ?”

Well, what is man? How can one find out?

Mr. Burbank tells, in his biography, of one of his correspondents who sent him squash seeds, beans, and kernels of corn from an Arizona cliff dwelling. There might have been two ways of examining them: first, analyze them to see what they were made of and what they are; and second, plant them and see what they may become. Two ways, but only one way that any sane student of plant life would adopt. For a seed is not only what it *is*, but what it may grow into.

The critics of democracy go to great pains to expose the frailties and follies of men as they are. There is no lack of data for confirmation of this harsh judgment. History abounds in it. The newspapers are filled with it. The most casual observation and the most ordinary experience in business or society, or even in the enterprises of organized religion, reveal humiliating evidences of the stupidity, the grossness, the selfish-

ness of people. It is no adequate answer to say that men are also sometimes heroic and fine. So they are, but merely setting the good against the bad in the observed facts of human conduct leaves the issue still in doubt. If virtue preponderates at all, it is by no such margin as to put the matter beyond cavil and controversy.

We need an assurance of the worth of human nature of a different quality from any dubious balance that we can ever get by merely casting up the debits and credits of worthy and unworthy acts. Democracy requires that we shall trust men, yet they often show themselves untrustworthy. Christianity requires that we love men, yet they often show themselves unlovable. It is a practical necessity of the moral life that we reverence self, yet we know too well how little we deserve reverence. The actual self is always imperfect, often unworthy, sometimes despicable. Other selves may be better or worse; some are obviously better, some apparently worse; but few are radically different. How, in the face of all

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

these facts, can we trust, love, and reverence human nature? Was the psalmist a victim of his own blind optimism or of an almost incredible exaggeration of the merits of humanity when he paid to men that amazing tribute, "Thou has made him a little lower than God, and hast crowned him with glory and honour"? Surely, he had no such high opinion of the enemies who sought his life, or of the son who plotted against his throne, or of himself in view of his rather notable derelictions from even the relatively easy moral code of his day.

The answer is in the possible David, the possible man, the possible you. Not the actualities, but the potentialities of our common humanity entitle it to respect. Browning has said it: "It is not what man does which exalts him but what man would do." More than that, he is exalted by what he ultimately can do even though he lacks both the present will and the immediate ability to perform it. Our failures may be disgraceful, but they are not final. Human nature

THE POSSIBLE YOU

may deserve every harsh thing that the critic or even the cynic can say of it—everything except this, that it cannot be changed. For the truest thing that can be said about human nature is that it *can be changed*. It is constantly being changed. The whole course of history and the record of the lives of all the men who have become good and great and useful is one continued story of changes in human nature. Whether the fundamental human instincts and impulses can be altered is not the point. What if they cannot be? If the way in which they work is changed, we have changed lives and a changed world, and in that possibility of change lies the promise of all those values which our minds crave and which the practical demands of life require us to find under penalty of disgust and despair.

The conventional opening for every cynical assertion of the permanence and inevitability of the evils that afflict society is: "Human nature being what it is—" Yes, human nature, being what it is at this present moment, does at this

present moment the things that it does. The child, being what he is, thinks, speaks, and acts as a child. But also, being what he is, he changes and presently ceases to be a child. A cross section of his impulses and attributes at a given moment does not describe him, for the most important thing about a child is that he is not always going to be one. Human nature, being what it is, is not only what it is now, but what it has the power to become.

We may apply this principle to the question of war and peace, to the industrial struggle, to the dominance of the profit motive in business. Human nature being what it is, men have certain desires for personal gratification and a certain sense of social responsibility. At the present stage in human evolution, these impulses lead men into strange and violent and unprofitable struggles in which they often lose the very things they care most for. But they are not wholly selfish struggles. A business man, professing to act upon the profit motive stated in the most

THE POSSIBLE YOU

egoistic terms, will sacrifice his own interests for those of his family. A striker will often sacrifice the interests of his family for those of his class. A soldier, under the impulsion of that strange madness we call war, will sacrifice his life for what he believes to be the interest or honor of his country.

Is it inconceivable that, in the human nature which already manifests so clearly, even if crudely, the sense of social responsibility, there will be changes which will enable it to achieve the ends which it desires and conserve the values which it prizes without sacrificing other and higher interests? It is not a question of remaking the essence of human nature, but of changing the way in which it works and of learning a more excellent way of meeting specific social situations. Christianity itself is built upon the recognition of those possibilities of human nature which have not yet, to any great extent, been realized in actual practice.

Jesus' faith in men was not based upon admi-

ration for their visible virtues or upon an excess of fortunate over unfortunate experiences in his dealings with them. He was not without the consolations of friendship and he saw from time to time isolated instances of fidelity and unselfishness, but on the whole his personal experience among men was enough to have made him doubt whether they were worth saving, if he had judged them by what they were then and there. It was their possibilities that interested him, and gave him faith and courage. Peter was wavering and timid, but had possibilities of stability. John was blustering and arrogant, but had possibilities of the rarest spiritual vision and the purest love. Judas was avaricious and crafty, but we may well believe that he had possibilities of financial and administrative ability which might later have saved the "poor saints at Jerusalem" from much suffering if he had not wasted his talent and disappointed, as well as betrayed, his Master. It was of little consequence that he went out and killed the contemptible actual Judas, for he had

THE POSSIBLE YOU

already slain the noble possible Judas whom Jesus had loved and chosen.

Constantly Jesus appealed to the judgments and impulses of ordinary men, and every appeal to man's nobility was an expression of his assurance that what he appealed to was there. It was not always there as a present actuality, but its presence even as a possibility is an essential element in the description of humanity. "If you, being evil,—" he said. It seems rather a harsh word. A minister today would hesitate to speak so to his congregation; still more, perhaps, would he hesitate to speak so to a casual crowd of non-church-goers whose favor he is trying to win. But Jesus saw and frankly said that these people were bad. And yet, even in their own consciousness, in the impulses and practices of these people whom he called evil, he found materials out of which to build faith in God. It would have been less surprising if he had chosen the best possible man and had said, God is something like that. Instead, he started with quali-

ties which he found in a miscellaneous company of those who were so far from being saints that he unhesitatingly called them evil. He told them to base their faith in God upon what they found in themselves, evil as they were.

“If you, bad as you are, know how to give your children what is good, how much more surely will your father in heaven give what is good to those who ask him for it.” If the raw material of humanity, even in its rawest form, has in it something that points to the existence of a beneficent principle in the universe and becomes a ground upon which to sustain faith in God Himself, surely it ought to be enough also to form the starting-point for a practical working faith in man—in ourselves as well as in those about us.

It is possible to think about the struggle for existence, that fierce war for survival among plants and animals competing for a limited food supply and for a place in the sun, until the bloody fang and claw come to seem the symbol

THE POSSIBLE YOU

of survival and Nature herself not a kind mother but a bloody Moloch that destroys all but the most ruthless. But there is another side to the matter. Nature has its healing force as well as its fiercely competitive and murderously destructive aspects. The forest fire sweeps over the mountains leaving the blackness of desolation behind it, and the next spring the wild flowers are knee-deep over that same terrain. Wounds heal. If there are scars, they are not more the reminders of the blood that flowed than of that beneficent power which staunched the flow and restored the organism to its normal condition. Sorrows are softened with time and bitter griefs blossom into sweet memories. Dr. Richard Cabot says that of two hundred fifteen known diseases, we can cure eight or nine by specific drugs. Surgery can cure a few more, and the others cure themselves if they are cured at all. That is to say, there is a healing power either in the organism itself or in places accessible to it. Typhoid fever, he says, cures itself nine times

out of ten—but not unless the patient is properly nourished and fed. The body must have a chance to function for its own healing.

It is only an analogy, of course, but a reasonable one, that the soul of man has also powers of recuperation as it has of growth—if it also is properly nourished and fed. The whole process of education, the whole program of religion, and the whole range of activity for social betterment—all rest upon the hypothesis that there are possibilities both in the individual and in human society as a whole which have never been realized. In an age of material progress it is amazing to hear men say that there is no possibility of moral advance. The prophet of a better social order is accused of dreaming about utopias. But a map of the world that has no utopia on it, no undiscovered better country, no continent awaiting further exploration and development, would be a most uninteresting map and one wholly untrue to the facts of the case.

This, I take it, is one way of stating the mean-

THE POSSIBLE YOU

ing and message of Christianity. To the man who is merely conventionally respectable, complacent because he compares not unfavorably with his neighbors, pretty good, as men go, but no active force for the betterment of his part of his world, it says: Do not be satisfied with that. You have possibilities which you have not yet begun to develop. You are like a man raising turnips in a field where there are diamonds a foot below the surface. Dig deeper. You are like Bunyan's man with the muckrake, stooping so low that he could not see the crown that hung over his head. Reach higher.

To the man who has too little faith in himself, who is troubled by his sins or his failures, it says: Your sins are quite as bad as you think they are; probably worse; but you do not need to keep them. Your failure may be as serious as it seems to you; but it is not final. You have resources which you have not yet utilized. You are like a man who has had losses and thinks he is bankrupt, when in reality he has assets which he

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

has forgotten about or never knew that he had. You may be a failure now in character or achievement, but you do not need to stay a failure. The possible you is not a moral bankrupt. All the resources of infinity are at your disposal, if you will but have the courage to draw upon them.

To the man who thinks too meanly of his fellow men, judging them by their visible faults and follies, it says: They are just as good as you are, in potentiality if not in present achievement. At least they are good enough for God to care for, and men no better were good enough for Jesus to associate with. If they are ignorant, teach them. If they have fallen, help them to rise. If they are hungry, feed them. If sick or in prison, minister to them. They are worth it, for they are your brothers and there are possibilities in them which perhaps can never be developed without your help.

To the man who thinks that the evils of society—all its wars and cruelties and injustices,

its stupidities and oppressions—are a part of the natural order of things which must go on because human nature is what it is, it says: That is not what human nature is. Human nature has passions and impulses which are neither good nor evil in themselves. If they produce bad results, it is because they are badly organized and directed, because elements which should be good servants are allowed to become bad masters, because men like you have not taken the trouble to use their intelligence and good-will to produce a social structure which is as good as human nature is. The possibilities are there, but they will not come to realization by themselves. The kingdom of God will come upon earth only as men have faith in man as well as faith in God and are willing to invest their energies in it with a courageous belief that better things can come to pass than have ever yet happened.

In the very stuff of humanity—not in the exceptional qualities of saints or the rare insights of seers and mystics, but in the ordinary qualities

AFFIRMATIVE RELIGION

of ordinary people—are the seeds out of which can grow not only faith in God but all that is noblest and most lovable in human life. It requires care and nurture, and the warmth of God's love and the light of His truth and the coöperation of men of good will. It is this possibility of achieving a future vastly better than the past or the present that is the most human thing in human nature, and it is this possibility which is the ground of God's faith in man, which is even greater than man's faith in God. "The possible you" is the hope of the world.



THE HOUSE OF HARPER

NEW YORK

Publishers of BOOKS and of
HARPER'S MAGAZINE

Established 1817

BR
125
G32

Garrison, Winfred Ernest, 1874-

Affirmative religion, by Winfred Ernest Garrison. New
York and London, Harper & brothers, 1928.

viii p., 1 l., 292 p., 1 l. 191^{cm}.

1. Title. 1. Faith. 2. Religion.

Library of Congress

BR125.G32

23-24262

CCSC/ej

336340

